

SERMONS.

SERMONS

PREACHED IN

ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH, QUEBEC,

By JOHN COOK, D.D., LL.D.

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**To all who are, or have been members of
St. Andrew's Church,
Quebec,
wherever now scattered,**

**This Volume
is affectionately inscribed, as a memorial of a Ministry
extending over well nigh fifty years.**

St. Andrew's Manse, Quebec, 1888.

CONTENTS.

I.

CHRIST THE LAMB OF GOD.

ST. JOHN i, 29.

Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.

Page I

II.

CHRIST THE REVEALER OF GOD

ST. JOHN i, 18.

No man hath seen God at any time ; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

14

III.

CHRIST THE LIVING SAVIOUR, AND LORD.

HEBREWS xii, 2.

Looking unto Jesus.

28

IV.

THE SPIRITUAL KINDRED OF CHRIST.

ST. MATTHEW xii, 46-50.

While he yet talked to the people, behold his mother and his brethren stood without desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, behold thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, who is my mother ? And who are my brethren ? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples and said, behold my mother and my brethren ! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

40

V.

CHRIST'S MISSION ON EARTH.

ST. MATTHEW xx, 26, 27, 28.

Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister, and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant, even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Page 53

VI.

THE DOCTRINE OF REWARD.

ST. MATTHEW x, 41, 42.

He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward ; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward ; and whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

65

VII.

THE WEIGHTIER MATTERS OF THE LAW.

ST. MATTHEW xxiii, 23.

Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ; for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith ; these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

77

VIII.

THE TWO GREAT COMMANDMENTS.

ST. MATTHEW xxii, 35-40.

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question tempting him, Master, which is the great commandment in the law ? And he said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

90

IX.

THE SEPARATE FUNCTIONS OF LAW AND LOVE.

I. TIMOTHY i, 9.

Knowing this that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient.

102

X.

CHRIST'S DOCTRINE, HOW TO BE TESTED.

ST. JOHN, vii, 17.

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. 114

XI.

OUTER AND INNER CREED IN MEN.

ST. MATTHEW vi, 23.

If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness. Page 129

XII.

GOVERNMENT OF THE THOUGHTS.

PSALM cxix, 113.

I hate vain thoughts : but thy law do I love. 140

XIII.

INFLUENCE UPON OTHERS FOR GOOD OR EVIL.

PSALM xl, 3.

He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God : many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord. 153

XIV.

CALLING EVIL GOOD AND GOOD EVIL.

ISAIAH v, 20.

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil ; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness ; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. 166

XV.

THE DANGER OF RELAPSE INTO SIN.

ST. MATTHEW xii, 43, 44, 45.

When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out ; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there ; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. 179

XVI.

DO MEN GROW BETTER AS THEY GROW
OLDER.

PSALM xcii, 13, 14, 15.

Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age ; they shall be fat and flourishing ; to shew that the Lord is upright ; he is my rock and there is no unrighteousness in him.

Page 191

XVII.

COMPARATIVE DANGER OF POVERTY AND
RICHES.

PHILIPPIANS iv, 12.

I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound : everywhere, and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

203

XVIII.

THE IMMUTABILITY OF THE DIVINE WORD.

ISAIAH xl, 6, 7, 8.

The voice said, cry. And he said, what shall I cry ? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field : The grass withereth, the flower fadeth ; because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it : surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth ; but the Word of our God shall stand for ever.

216

XIX.

THE ABSENCE OF CHANGE GIVING RISE TO
UNGODLINESS.

PSALM lv, 19.

Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.

227

XX.

WHY IS THERE NOT MORE EVIDENCE OF A
FUTURE LIFE.

JOB xiv, 14.

If a man die shall he live again ?

242

XXI.

THE PURPOSE OF CHRIST'S DEPARTURE,
AND THE PROMISE OF HIS RETURN.

ST. JOHN xiv, 2, 3.

In my Father's house are many mansions : if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself ; that where I am there ye may be also.

Page 257

XXII.

THE WILL OF CHRIST THAT HIS PEOPLE BE
WITH HIM.

ST. JOHN xvii, 24.

Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me, where I am ; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me.

271

XXIII.

THE REVELATION AND EXECUTION OF
JUDGMENT.

ROMANS ii, 5. ST. JUDE xiv, 15.

The day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

And Enoch also, seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

285

XXIV.

SELF EXAMINATION.

2 COR. xiii, 5.

Prove your own selves.

298

XXV.

COMMUNION WITH GOD.

EXODUS xxv, 22.

I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat.

311

XXVI.

SENSE OF DIVINE LOVE PROMPTING TO
OBEDIENCE.

PSALM CXIX, 32.

I will run the way of thy commandments when thou shalt enlarge my heart.

325

XXVII.

THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH EXPECTED
BY ST. PAUL.

EPHESIANS iv, 11, 12, 13.

And he gave some apostles : and some prophets : and some evangelists : and some pastors and teachers, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

Page 337

SERMONS.

I.

CHRIST THE LAMB OF GOD.

ST. JOHN I. 29.

Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.

IT is a noble nature with which God has endowed us, the children of men. It would be untrue to ourselves and unthankful to God to disown or be insensible to the nobleness of it. It has powers giving it such ample superiority in this lower world; it has so many sources of large and exalted enjoyment opened up to it; it can so observe, and remember and judge and combine; it has such capacities of social affection; it has such apprehensions of moral rectitude; it has such aspirings to the God and Maker of all. Verily, as said the ancient patriarch, "There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding." Well might the Apostle claim honour for all so richly endowed by the God who gave them being. Well may we judge that Scripture saying true, that man—how far soever he may and must be from the Infinite was made in the image of God. Well might Paul found his reasonings with the Athenians, concerning God, on what certain of their own poets had said: "For we are also his offspring." Of all on earth the nature of man approaches the nearest to that of God. Then in the long course of the world's history, there are so many shining tokens and trophies of what man can do; what labors he can undergo;

what acts of magnanimity he can perform ; what works of genius he can produce ; what capacity there is for manly daring and womanly courage, constancy, and endurance, even more worthy of admiration. What stores of science has not man accumulated ! What treasures of art ! How loftily he has sung of nature and of nature's God ! To what noble harmonies has the immortal verse been joined ! How strong he has showed in the battle of life ! How calm in the hour of death ! Is it not much to feel that we are kindred with the great and good ones of our race, made of one blood, children of one stock, inheritors of a common nature, which they have proved to be so worthy ? Engaged in such contemplations, shutting out from the mind's view whatever might introduce a different train of thought and feeling—even, as in ancient times, it was a proud boast for any one to be able to say—while recounting the victories and the achievements of the great republic, I also am a Roman ; so in view of the demonstrated powers and capacities of our nature, there might be felt a like exultation in saying : I also am a man—one of a race which God has endowed so richly.

But is there no drawback to such exultation—nothing to check the self-complacent feeling so ready to spring up in man's bosom ; nothing to make him bow his head in shame ; nothing to shake his soul with terror ? Alas ! amidst the many powers and affections of man's nature, raising him so far above all other creatures here below, there is one root of bitterness. That is sin—the consciousness of sin—that is in every bosom, and though man often refuses to entertain it, or regard it, though he turns his eyes from it, and would fain think it is not, there it still is, ever ready, spectre-like, to spring up, filling the soul with remorse for the past, with apprehension for the future, and giving a humiliating sense of unworthiness and guilt. Ah ! it is no light thing sin, whatever a thoughtless world may venture to say of it. What does so degrade a man in his own apprehension, even when no eye sees him and no soul

is conscious of the evil? What would he so gladly conceal from the knowledge of others, and palliate to their apprehensions, and his own? What makes him fear death? What gives a fearful looking for of judgment? What gives terrible thoughts of the worm that never dieth, and the fire that is never quenched? What is even now as a gnawing worm and a scorching fire? What, but sin—the consciousness of sin! Is it a light thing which does all this? With all man's wisdom, is he able to counteract its working; with all his power, has he strength to dismiss it; with all his energy, can he set it at nought? No. In the sober hours, when reason is allowed to have freest scope, let it be turned to the consideration of a man himself, and there will be the consciousness of sin. Whenever, from any cause, conscience is most acutely alive to moral distinctions, such consciousness of sin will be clearest and deepest. At every season, when God is most directly contemplated, this consciousness will rise up in the soul. And often when in the dissolution of soul and body, other thoughts and feelings pass away, *it* remains, filling the dark valley with images of terror and putting its sting into the hand of death.

This consciousness of sin has respect to the past and to the future. In respect of the past, it gives the feeling of guilt, of danger, of desert of punishment. It makes a man feel that he has placed himself in opposition to God, the will of God, the law of God. It makes a man feel that he is subject to the penalties of the law he has violated. How shall he get out of a position so hopeless as that into which rebellion against God has brought him? How shall he escape the execution of the sentence which the law of God pronounces with such emphatic decision on the sinner? Will repentance do? How does he know that it will do? In every age there have been evident tokens of the apprehension in man's spirit that it will not do. What else were the sacrifices which men were everywhere ready to offer—not withholding even the fruit of the body to make atone-

ment for the sin of the soul? Wherefore were such sacrifices offered, if there were no fear in the heart that the tears and even the change of a sincere repentance might not avail? But even if repentance would avail, is it in man to repent, repent truly, repent of all sin, both in the sense of being sorry for it, and in the sense of forsaking it? Is it in man's own power so to repent, as that even his very repentance shall not have a measure of sin in it? If the sinner were to express his true condition—apart, that is, from the provisions of the Gospel—it would be in such terms as these: "I know not if repentance is all that the necessities of the Divine Government require to ensure the sinner's pardon, and, if it were, my repentance is not itself able to stand without challenge the judgment of God. How then may I become just with God? How may I hope for acquittal at his bar? How escape that condemnation from Him, which the condemnation of conscience foreshadows and foretells?"

But the consciousness of sin has respect also to the future. I mean now the future of this present life. In respect of it, it gives the feeling of weakness, moral weakness, and inability to resist sin. The consciousness of sin in a man is not merely the feeling that he has sinned, but the feeling also that he is inclined to sin; that the tendency is in him, and that unaided and alone he is unable to resist it. How, with any adequate idea of the demands of God's holy law, demands suited to the nature of man, and to disregard which, is not sin only, but folly, degradation and dishonour, to render to the law a perfect obedience; how to keep the heart so that no vain thought shall lodge within it, and no evil affection rule over it; how to set such watch upon the tongue, as that no word either idle or unprofitable shall be uttered by it; how to regulate the whole tenor of every-day life in perfect accordance not only with honesty and truth, but with holy charity; how to walk with God in habitual mindfulness, in peaceful communion and holy obedience; how to do all this, as

a good man should do, and find his delight in doing, the sinner knows not, nor can understand. If the sinner were to express his true condition, in this respect, apart that is, from the provisions of the Gospel, it would be in such terms as these: "I am burdened with guilt, but were it all taken away, and I left in the moral state in which I now am, I should speedily incur fresh guilt, and be as heavily burdened as before. Oh! how am I to become holy indeed? How to be freed from the slavery under which I groan, to lusts and passions which I should not obey, but which I cannot control? There is a 'law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death'?"

In respect of the past, therefore, the necessities of the sinner require that something be done *for* him; something to alter the legal position in which he stands, as self-condemned, and God-condemned; something that shall shield him from the penalties of the law; something that shall lift the burden of fear and apprehension of conscious guilt from off his spirit, and make him able to see God loving and reconciled notwithstanding all his sins. And, in respect of the future, the sinner requires that something be done *in* him, giving a new turn to his inclinations and desires, imparting fresh energy and power to such moral purposes as he may be induced to form, inclining him to what is good, strengthening him to hold by what is good. Only thus could his sins be effectually taken away—so taken away as that he may hope to stand before God as an accepted child of the heavenly family now, and be finally received as a holy member of that great family hereafter, in the kingdom of glory above; and thus it is that Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, takes away sin.

As respects guilt, he takes it away by the sacrifice of himself. It is not only as expressive of his meekness and innocence, and perfect purity, that he is called the

Lamb of God, but as betokening his voluntary sacrifice of himself; that sacrifice of which the ordinance of the Supper is a memorial, and the words in which he instituted it a sufficient intimation and evidence—"This is my body broken for you," "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for many, for the remission of sins,"—that sacrifice, by "the one offering of which he hath perfected for ever all those that are sanctified." Objections have been raised to this doctrine of the sacrificial offering of Christ. Why should one suffer for others? How is it to be supposed that God would have pleasure in the sufferings of a holy and innocent person? How should the sufferings of one atone for the sins of all? These and questions such as these readily occur to most, and as it were counteract the Scripture doctrine of the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world. Yet there is no real force in them, as if they presented difficulties from which our moral nature recoils, or represented what it could never be reconciled to. It is an act of virtue, to which, in the extent in which it appears in the world, we accord the tribute of approval and admiration, when one man takes on himself to bear the consequences of the faults of others, and so prevents or heals the sorrows which they would otherwise endure? Such self-sacrifice for others the world, bad as it is, has ever admired and honoured, and when carried to a great and unwonted extent has seen in it the highest virtue. Did not Rome honour of old the hero who leaped into the gulf that the city might be saved, and does not all posterity ratify the judgment formed of his nobleness of purpose? And in whom does this highest virtue, that which goes deepest into men's hearts, and gains most ready acknowledgment, appear more appropriately than in God's own Son; one with God in respect of his divinity, perfectly holy and unspotted in his human nature? The sacrifice of Jesus is the greatest act of virtue, the most marvellous in the extent of its condescension and love, which, not only the history of the world records, but which man's heart can

conceive ; but it is in its nature akin to acts of virtue which all approve, and to which true Christianity is ever giving rise. For does not St. John say : " Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us ; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." It is ever to be remembered that the sacrifice of Christ was a voluntary offering. It was in accordance with the Father's will indeed, we are taught, that he undertook the work of our redemption by the sacrifice of himself, but we are equally taught, that his will was in perfect accordance with the Father's will. " Then, said I," so he is represented as speaking in the prophetic Psalms : " Lo I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me : ' I delight to do thy will, oh my God ! yea, thy law is within my heart.' " No man could take his life from Him. He had power to lay it down and power to take it up again, and his voluntary humiliation and death for sinners is the most sublime act of virtue that the world ever saw, or can see.

But why was it necessary, or what satisfaction could it be to God, that a holy Being should so suffer more than any man and be afflicted more than the sons of men ? Why should it appear strange, that it is not given us to know all the reasons which rendered necessary such a sacrifice ? It is enough for us to know that the law was magnified and made honourable by it, and is it not a great and worthy end to contemplate and accomplish, to give lustre and dignity, and a more sacred right as it were, of obligation to that law holy, just and good, which is the expression of God's will ! It is enough for us to know, as a matter of experience, that the faith of this sacrifice has served and does serve to slay the enmity of the natural mind, and create in the soul the very source and fountain of all virtue, the love of God. And as to God's taking pleasure in the sufferings of the holy Saviour, that the Scriptures say not. But he takes pleasure—as if there be any conformity in the moral nature of God with that of man, he must do, in the spectacle of virtue, exhibited

among these sufferings, the patience, the fortitude, the meekness, the magnanimity of Him who gave Himself for us. That was a spectacle the contemplation of which shall never cease to call forth the admiration and the praise of men and angels round the throne of God. Nay, and it was and is an object of complacency to the Divine mind, as when the voice came forth from the excellent glory : "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ;" and in respect of this, that the sufferings of one atoned for the sins of many, it is to be remembered that the peculiar dignity of the person of Christ, the union in Him of the human with the divine, imparted a peculiar worth and value to His sufferings, rendering them an ample vindication of the law, an ampler vindication of the excellence of obedience to it ; as ample as if a sinful world had perished for its sin ; nay giving still more illustrious tokens of the obligation and the excellence of virtue.

To the sinner thus suffering under the consciousness of sin, oppressed with a sense of guilt, what says the Gospel ? It speaks to him in the language of the text : "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Jesus, the Son of God, took on himself the burden of thy guilt. In the garden and on the cross He paid the penalty of thy sins. He has removed every obstacle in the way of thy return to God. The law hath no more claim against thee. God is waiting to be gracious. He beseeches you to be reconciled unto Him. Now, this language may fall on ears that will not listen, preoccupied with worldly vanities or cares. It may come to minds, unawakened or unbelieving, and in either case prove ineffectual for any great or holy purpose. What matters it to a man what the message be, if he refuses to receive it ? But when such message from God comes to a soul awakened to a sense of sin, and longing to be freed from the burden of its guilt, and carried with power to the heart, by the good Spirit of God, it is received with faith, it makes a change *in* a man, the very change which he needs for his future deliverance from sin :

insomuch, that while the sacrifice of Christ for sinners takes away the guilt of sin and places in a right relation to God, the faith of that sacrifice, comprehended in its origin, in its execution and in its results, takes away the disposition to sin, and creates the new heart and the right spirit. If the sacrifice of Christ, in regard of God, renders possible, without dishonour to the law, his reconciliation to the sinner, the knowledge and faith of it works in the sinner reconciliation to God. All the obstacles under the holy government of Heaven, to the full reconciliation of God to the sinner we do not know. We know more about the obstacles which exist in the heart of the sinner to a full reconciliation with God. There is fear of God. There is enmity against God. There is a stubborn will opposed to the will of God. There are inclinations and desires drawing us in a direction the opposite of that which He would have us to take. What is it which has power to contend against all these and to gain the victory over them all? No voice of terror could accomplish it. The thunders of Sinai could not accomplish it, nor the trumpet of the angel summoning the dead to judgment, nor the voice of the Judge pronouncing sentence on the wicked. The evil heart would not by these become less evil. Nay it might cleave to its evil the more, fear and hatred, and the evil will all strengthening within it. But what these could not do, love can do—God's love, God's marvellous and unparalleled love. That dispels the fear. That does away the enmity. That moves to repentance. That inspires trust and grateful affection. That draws from the soul the earnest question, to be ever present and ever receiving fresh answer, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits to me"? That makes the soul say: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do," and puts it on obedience. Even in alienations and strifes between man and man, the manifestation of love on either side does more to reconcile than power or wisdom can accomplish. And so it is, in respect of the alienation between God and man; only the manifestation of God's

love can clear it away ; such manifestation as the soul is no longer able to doubt or distrust. And such manifestation there is in the sacrifice of Christ to the believing soul. The faith of it works love. It makes a new creature. It begins a new life, a holy, a spiritual life, and so in another sense than before, yet not less necessary to the salvation of the sinner, Jesus, the Lamb of God, takes away the sin of the world.

In such statements as have now been made, the thought may readily occur : You speak as if all were done at once ; the removal of every guilty apprehension, the removal of every sinful disposition—the moment true faith is exercised, the full assurance of forgiveness and a perfect sanctification communicated instantaneously. Does experience accord with the theory ? Is it so faith acts ? Were you overstating its power, and going beyond what the experience of believers can attest ? We should not overstate the power of faith to do all this, if faith were always genuine, were always perfect, if it involved and embraced always an intelligent apprehension of all that is implied in the sacrifice of the Lamb of God for sinners. What in experience may be called in to correct the theory we have laid down, is not to dispute or deny the efficacy of such faith to produce even such results, but to admit the imperfection of the faith which believers exercise, and of their apprehensions of what Christian faith should embrace. Faith is founded on knowledge. We cannot believe what we do not know or apprehend. Now, nothing is more certain than that believers differ in the extent and clearness of their apprehensions of Christ, and of his work ; that no believer does at once rise to the full apprehension of these ; that faith is therefore necessarily imperfect even in respect of what it should embrace, while it may be further imperfect, and often is, in respect of the confidence and the firmness with which it holds what it does embrace. It is nothing to the point, that men in the expression of their faith, and honestly, and without conscious reservation, make use of

the same words. Words pregnant with great and important meanings, convey more or less of these meanings to different minds. The Lamb of God! How various, how rising in greatness, how increasing in extent the ideas which this title suggests, as used by you or me in our state of imperfect knowledge, or by a redeemed spirit before the throne, or by an angelic intelligence, which has for ages before the world's history began, been conversant with the ways and the working of God. And so it is, though to a less extent, as between different minds here below—minds in different stages of intellectual culture, of moral advancement, of religious impression. The truth is, while any true faith in Jesus, the Lamb of God, will so far tranquillize the conscience and exercise a sanctifying influence on the heart, it must itself advance to perfection, to do its work with perfection. We are commanded to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But if we grow in knowledge, faith must also grow in regard of the extent of knowledge it embraces; and it may also grow in the firmness with which it holds the truth. Let us not wonder then, that a faith often weak and imperfect, though genuine, works not at once the full result which is required. That will advance with the advance of Christian knowledge and faith. It is not, Behold *once* Jesus, by faith, the Lamb of God, and all fear of sin or love of sin shall flee away, and for ever. This might be so, if the soul comprehended at once and received at once all that the 'Lamb of God' implies, and so it may be in certain cases. For who shall limit the power of God to enlighten the mind, or in imparting the gift of faith? But so it is not usually. Because of imperfect faith, there are recurring fears and doubts in regard of the soul's relation to God, and there are inclinations allowed to rise up again and plead for indulgence, and gain it, and so the admonition needed by the believer, is: Behold the Lamb of God; day by day behold him; in the exercise of faith, behold him, if thou wouldst have peace of conscience to dwell within thee, or holy tempers

and dispositions to retain the ascendancy in thy soul. Carry about with thee continually the dying of the Lord Jesus. Not in acts of devotion only, but amidst the world's business, thy believing thought must be of "God manifest in the flesh," the suffering, self-sacrificing Saviour.

I have spoken, at the commencement of this discourse, of the nobleness of our nature, noble still even in its fall, and proving its nobleness in successive generations, so that it still appears, though the crown has fallen from his head, though the gold has become dim, and the most fine gold been changed, that man was created at the first in the image of God. But the highest token of the original nobleness of his nature is that the Word that was in the beginning with God assumed it. The best proof of its worth is that Jesus died that it might be restored in believers to its original glory and honour. And if there be a glory even in man fallen, how much greater the glory there is in man redeemed and renewed. Will it destroy any power of reason or understanding ; will it destroy any social affection ; will it shut up any avenue of enjoyment to a refined and elevated taste ; will it relax any exertion in which man's energies are put forth for purposes worthy of his nature ; will it chase away any smile that may legitimately play on a human countenance or any emotion of gladness which may legitimately rise in a human bosom ; will it make earth less a field for the forthputting of human energies, if the spectral apprehension of guilt as before God, which ever and anon rises in thoughtful spirits, were forever withdrawn and the soul at peace with itself lived also in holy friendship and communion with its God ? Surely this would be the highest state of man here below. Peace with God, love to God, through the faith of Christ ; these harmonize all the powers and principles of man ; these give dignity to life in the humblest sphere ; these give hope and tranquillity in death ; these give meetness for heaven ; and they all flow into the soul, that beholds—beholds habitu-

ally—and with true faith, “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.”

In that higher state for which this is only the preparation, and all its doings and sufferings only the needful discipline without which the soul cannot enter on it or enjoy it, it is, it would seem, by beholding the Lamb of God more clearly, more fully, more immediately and perfectly, that the exaltation and refinement of our nature is to make advancement. For wherein is that exaltation and refinement to consist? Is it not in likeness to that blessed Lamb of God himself? What perfection of which the human nature is capable dwells not in the human nature which He assumed, which He, the God-man, still has in union with the Divine? And how is such likeness to be produced and to make progress? St. John tells us, by seeing him as he is; “It doth not appear,” says he, “what we shall be, but we know when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” That beatific vision is reserved for the saints above. But even here on earth it is given us by faith to behold the Lamb of God, and “beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we,” all who believe, “are transformed into the same image from glory to glory as by the spirit of the Lord.”

II.

CHRIST THE REVEALER OF GOD.

ST. JOHN I. 18.

No man hath seen God at any time ; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

THE first clause of the text expresses a truth which no one thinks of disputing or denying. We are all familiar with the word "God," and with certain ideas which that word suggests we are also familiar. But no one pretends or professes to have seen God—God Himself—the Personal Deity, the Infinite, the Eternal, the Unchangeable, the Lord and Maker, the Ruler and Governor of all things ; to have looked on Him with the bodily eye, to have had Him revealed to the observation of the senses. We are cognizant of the works which establish the wisdom of His counsel and the glory of His power, but no son of man can discover His hand or trace His footsteps. He sits in inaccessible majesty behind the elements which He has made. He holdeth back the face of His throne and spreadeth His cloud over it. He dwells in light which no man can approach unto. Still the saying of the text holds true : "No man hath seen God at any time ;" and St. Paul puts it still further, "Him no man hath seen, or can see."

There are states of mind in which the spirit of man is impatient of this concealment, this impenetrable mystery which shrouds the presence of the Godhead, however it rises out of the perfection of the Divine, and the weakness and necessary limitation of the human nature, and though it is impossible that a spiritual and all pervading essence should be subjected to the scrutiny of the senses. "There are times when there rises up irrepressibly in the mind the impatient question : Where is this mighty Being with whom

I have to do, to whose control I am every moment subject, by whose providence I am every moment sustained, at whose tribunal I must finally stand and be judged? Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat!—that mine ear could hear Him, that mine eye could look on Him, and that, from the direct observation of the senses, I could gather that conviction of His being, and that knowledge of His nature and character, which these same senses bring unto me, in regard of others, His creatures! I look on the unclouded sky, bright wherever the eye turns with stars innumerable, or, as I am told, with suns, round each of which there are worlds rolling,—that in which we dwell being among them only as a leaf in the forest, or as a grain of sand on the sea shore; but however intensely I look into the blue profound, striving to penetrate beyond what is immediately open to the senses, and to obtain a clearer, deeper, surer insight into heavenly mysteries, the eye can catch no token of the personal presence of God. There falls no sound on the ear which can be recognized as the voice of the Highest! All is unbroken silence and inscrutable mystery; and in despite of all my longing and all my efforts to have the clearer convictions of sense, I am constrained to fall back upon the cold and unsatisfying deductions of reason, or the exercises and contemplations of that faith which is the evidence of things not seen.

And let it not for a moment be denied, there is unspeakable difficulty in such conception of God as is to be formed and figured out of the conclusions of reason alone,—even the true conclusions of the highest reason. What can I know—that is, in any strict or accurate sense of the word “know”—of an invisible spirit, having a nature so different from that with which I am myself endowed, and all with whom I am familiar and associated? How shall I comprehend the conditions of a Being which had no beginning, and which never has been, and never will be, subject to change? Or what conception can I form of an essence

pervading universal space? It is probably impossible to combine more perfectly all the abstractions to which Reason and Revelation testify, as existing in the Deity, than in the memorable words with which we have been familiar from our childhood, "God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth." But who can figure out to himself the Being in whom all these attributes meet and dwell? The mind is fatigued and bewildered in the attempt to comprehend infinity of power, or of wisdom, eternal existence and all-pervading presence. "Who can by searching find out God? Who can find out the Almighty to perfection? It is high as heaven, what can we do?—deeper than hell, what can we know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth and broader than the sea." There may be the clearest conviction, or the most satisfying evidence, that a thing is, and at the same time the most perfect incapacity to comprehend how it is. An uninstructed peasant cannot for a moment doubt that thought and intelligence are conveyed by the electric wire, though he be profoundly ignorant, and incapable of comprehending how it is done. And so it is with us in regard of God. His Being and perfections are certainly revealed to the reason and conscience of man. It is a necessity of our nature to believe in and have some thoughts and feelings in respect of Him. Yet is the mind lost and perplexed when attempting to fathom the mysteries of His nature. With the most perfect conviction that He is, there is insuperable difficulty in comprehending *what* He is. And with the acknowledgment, which we are constrained to make, that He is hidden from the eyes of man, there is apt, as we have already said, to mingle a feeling of dissatisfaction and complaining,—something of the temper of mind of the ancient patriarch, when he said, "Lo, he goeth by me, and I see him not; he passeth on also, but I perceive him not."

With such dissatisfaction there is naturally joined a

desire to have other and more perfect manifestation of God. More especially is such a desire felt, when, by any means, the sense of God, and of relation to God, and responsibility to God, and dependence on God, has been specially impressed upon the soul. And such clearer and better manifestation of God, the Gospel professes to give. The second clause in the text tells us by whom it is given: "The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared him." The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, is obviously our Lord Jesus Christ. Now it is rather to what Christ has done in revealing and making known God, than to what He is Himself, that we have now to attend. Yet, be it observed in passing, that the loftiest ideas of His nature and union with God, are suggested to us by the terms in which He is here described. The expression "only begotten Son" plainly indicates a distinction between Him and all others, to whom in a looser sense the title "Sons of God," may be or has been applied. And the expression, "which is in the bosom of the Father," does also imply an altogether peculiar community of counsel with the Father, and enjoyment of the Father's complacency and love. But, as I have already said, our concern at present is with what Christ has done. It is the last words of the text we have to do with—"He hath declared," that is, He hath revealed, He hath manifested, He hath made known "God;" so the text says. The question is now; how has He done this—and has He done it effectually—and so, as in any measure, to satisfy the wishes of the anxious spirit striving after some adequate conception of God, and striving in vain.

Now in proceeding to answer this question, let it be observed that it is most natural to consider the special manifestation of God which is here spoken of, that made by Jesus Christ, in the days of His personal appearance on the earth. And it is to that manifestation we are specially to attend. Yet it would be to disregard one important

scriptural view of Christ, did we fail to recognize Him as the source of such manifestation of God as had been previously vouchsafed. However imperfectly, as compared with our desires or our necessities, God is revealed in the arrangements of the natural world, all of which do, as the apostle says, bear testimony to his eternal power and Godhead ; and however imperfect the revelation of God in the Old Testament times, compared with that brighter and better given under the new dispensation, no one can fail to see that it was a revelation for which there was abundant reason to be thankful, and in which the saints and people of God rejoiced and had cause to rejoice. Now it is according to the teaching of Scripture, to consider the only begotten Son, as having been in these as well as subsequently under the Gospel, the Revealer of God. The Evangelist St. John in the preceding verses of this chapter identifies that Holy One who was born of the Virgin, with the Word that was in the beginning with God, and was God. And having so done, he expressly adds : " All things were made by Him ; and without Him was not anything made that was made." And this is in harmony with what is said elsewhere, that by Him God made the world, that He upholds "all things by the word of His power," and that "by Him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by Him and for Him." According to this apostolic view of the matter, in a sense far deeper and more extensive than may at first sight appear, it is true that "no man hath seen God at any time." The Eternal Father is to men invisible and unknown, even by the material world, except through the agency of the Son. He is the revealer of God, in that He is the Creator of all, and the Ruler of all. All on earth, whether in the works of creation or providence, which exhibits wise counsel, and glorious power, and incessant working, and abounding goodness, is His doing. By Him the earth was clothed

with beauty and the heavens with magnificence. He made all. He governs all.

——— One spirit, His
Who wore the platted thorns with bleeding brows,
Rules universal nature.

Even as respects the knowledge of the being and great attributes of the Godhead, which is accessible to us through the things which are made, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared it.

And as it is with the revelation of God in nature and providence, so it is with the revelation of God made in former dispensations. If not by direct and explicit assertion, yet by plain inference from many passages of the Scriptures, we are warranted to identify the Jehovah of the Old Testament, with the Word that was in the beginning with God, and was God; the Word that in the fulness of time became flesh and dwelt among men. And so every manifestation of God made to the patriarchs and holy men of ancient times, was also made by Him who is described in the text, as the "only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father." He it was, who appeared to our first parents in the garden, to Abraham on the plains of Mamre, to Jacob on the memorable night which he spent by the brook Jabbok. He it was, whom Moses saw in the bush that burned, but was not consumed; who brought the chosen people out of the land of their bondage with a high hand and an outstretched arm; who went before them in a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night; who gave the law from Mount Sinai; who brought Israel into the promised land; who dwelt between the Cherubim; who inspired the Prophets; who was Lord of the Temple. All that was known, all that was published in those ancient times of the name and the memorial, the nature and character of God, was declared by Him. All the promises on which successive ages of the Church rested their hopes—all the precepts by which successive generations of believers regulated their lives, came from

Him. All the light which shone on the ancient Church, and that was more or less diffused over a world that was lying in wickedness, flowed forth from Him. Every appearance of God was an appearance of the Word, the Revealer. Then as now the Eternal Father was shrouded in unapproachable mystery. No man had seen Him at any time: "The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he had declared Him."

But we have already admitted the imperfection of all such revelations, how important soever they were, and however suited to the times in which, and to the persons to whom, they were made. We have also admitted that the human spirit craves more, longs for more;—in all time when there is an awe and sense of God upon it, cries for more. Has then more been given? In these, called in Scripture, the latter days, has an ampler manifestation of God been vouchsafed—such as is better suited to the capacities of man's nature, and more satisfying to him in the immediate feeling, and while constrained to make acknowledgement of, his all important and ever enduring relation to God? Did the Gospel give this? Did Christ give it? Does He give it still?

At least, it must be admitted, when we begin to consider these questions, that the Gospel professes to do it—that Jesus the author of the Gospel professes to do it. The disciple, whom Jesus loved, puts forth in the text a claim that he did it; and the same claim is put forth by St. Paul, when he speaks of Jesus as the "image of the invisible God," and of "beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." But the claim is asserted still more plainly and distinctly by Jesus himself. For proof of which, I need only refer to the answer which he gave to the request of Philip, "Lord; show us the Father, and it sufficeth us;" "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father, and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not, that I am in the Father, and the Father

in me? The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me." Observe the intimate union, the oneness, which Christ thus represents to exist between Him and the Father: "I am in the Father, and the Father in me. Believe me, I am in the Father, and the Father in me." And then as to the manifestation of the Father, which is what we are now specially concerned with, the words which He speaks, are He says, the Father's words—as much His, and as much indicating His will, character and purposes, as if He spoke them Himself—and who seeth and knoweth Him, seeth and knoweth also the Father: such is the union between Him and the Father.

Now it is not our object at present either to question or to defend the divine mission of Jesus, or the authority by which He spoke. We assume both of these—and our concern is to know what manifestation of God He did give.

One manifestation of God, the manifestation or intelligible knowledge of Him in the incommunicable attributes of His nature, He certainly did not give. Such manifestation it is impossible to make to man or to created being. The eternity, the spirituality, the infinity of the Divine nature may be so known to us, as that we shall be constrained to acknowledge them as Divine attributes; but they cannot be revealed so as to be fully understood, or conceived of, in all the height and depth of meaning which are involved in the words expressive of them. Nor can any adequate conception be given of the Being to whom such attributes belong. The finite cannot grasp the infinite; the human cannot take in, in its largest conceptions, the height and depth, and length and breadth of the Divine. Only a being with divine attributes can comprehend these attributes. "What man," says St. Paul, "knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no

man, but the Spirit of God." Of necessity therefore—necessity rising out of the limitation of man's natural powers and capacities, and the limitation of the powers and capacities of all creatures, the greatest and most exalted even of the Seraphim that are around the throne of God, such manifestation as we have now been speaking of is impossible. Nor did Christ profess to make it.

Such manifestation is not indeed what man needs, or what he craves in seasons, when most visited with spiritual earnestness and anxiety. What he needs and desires to see and know in God, is an object of worship to which his affections may go freely forth, and yet which shall constrain his adoring reverence. There is a longing for this in man's nature. Nowhere, do we find men long contented with worshipping the Eternal, the Infinite, the Incomprehensible. In the absence of authorized manifestations of that in God which can be understood and loved, men have everywhere made gods to themselves, suited to their own fancies and wishes. And even among those to whom the manifestation of God in the flesh had been made, when in process of time the humanity of the Saviour was partially forgotten or disregarded, through which humanity, He made intelligible those attributes of the Divinity which are the proper objects of trust and love, and reverence and obedience, and Jesus had come to be thought of chiefly in His mysterious union with the remote and inaccessible God-head, more familiar objects of adoration were sought and found, in the Virgin Mother, and in the Saints. The weary spirit shrank from persisting in its vain efforts to reach the Infinite in the Son or in the Father, and reposed on the more intelligible character and sympathies of their most eminent, yet wholly human servants. Now it is such manifestation of God, as men need and long for, which Christ gave in His teaching and yet more in His own person and character—a manifestation meeting and satisfying man's wants, yet giving no countenance to his errors or superstitions, his idolatry or will-worship.

Such manifestation Jesus gave, in the first place, in His teaching. To this He makes special allusions in the remarkable passage which I have already quoted: "The words which I speak unto you, I speak not of myself, but the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works." Now one great peculiarity—rather, perhaps, I should say, *the* great peculiarity in the teaching of Jesus concerning God, is His representation of Him as a Father—the Father. He dwells not on His uncreated glory, His universal presence or His irresistible power, but on His paternal character and His fatherly love. A wise Father God is, as Jesus represents Him, a holy Father, a Father whose will must not be resisted, but still a Father who is love and dwells in love. This is not the view of God which natural religion gives. Nay, and in the Old Testament God is more set forth as a great God and a great King, than in the character of a Father; though doubtless as the day of the Messiah was drawing nearer, and gleams of light shot across the moral atmosphere, from that Sun of righteousness, the period of whose rising was ever approaching, the sweet singer of Israel could testify: "Like as a Father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." It is Jesus who constantly sets forth God as the Father, and claims that He be regarded as such. Now to this representation of God, man can respond. He can comprehend it, and his heart is won by it. It claims and obtains, when duly received, gratitude and trust, and love in return for love; such love as makes it in the servant, the follower, the disciple, as it was in the Great Master, his meat to do the will of the Father and to finish His work. We have not to climb to the stars of heaven, nor to dive into the depths of ocean, to find an intelligible conception of the God we are to worship. Nor have we to seek it in difficult processes of abstract thought; but in our memory of the fathers of our flesh to whom we yielded reverence, and in the consciousness of paternal tenderness in our own bosoms, we find whereon to graft a divinely authorized

conception of God, possible for man to entertain and dwell upon, and yet drawing him to God.

But not only by His words and in His teaching, yet more, I now remark, in the second place, in His own person and character, did Jesus, "the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father," give the desired and needed manifestation of God. God manifest in the flesh, the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of His person, who so seeth Him, seeth the Father also. He is in the Father and the Father is in Him. Who so comprehendeth Jesus, as He is set forth in the simple narratives of the Evangelists, comprehendeth the Father; that, namely, in the Infinite, Eternal, Unchangeable God, as an object of worship, which he needs to know, which he can have in his mind, which he can understand and love.

There is a marked and marvellous change, when from the contemplation of Him, whom no mortal eye hath seen or can see, and from the toilsome effort to reach to something approaching, however imperfectly, to an adequate conception of His ineffable glory, the mind turns to Jesus, the human and yet the Divine Saviour, and dwells on the attributes of the Father as these are revealed in the Son who is one with Him. No man hath seen God at any time, nor can any man figure what God is. But on Jesus the eyes of men did look, and the pen of man, under the guidance of the good spirit of God, has recorded what man saw in Him. And from that record and by its help, it is still possible for us to call up before our minds, and to contemplate the Holy Saviour of mankind, as He appeared in the unruffled calmness of a nature, which was at once unspotted in purity and overflowing with tenderness. Divine power, wisdom and goodness, all in exercise for man's behoof, shone forth in the actions of His daily life, and in His whole execution of the great work for which He came.

I cannot in the season of spiritual conflict, I cannot in the endurance of bodily pain and distress, I cannot when

my soul is disquieted within me by reason of sin, or when I have reason to think that I am about to walk through the dark valley, and to wrestle with the last enemy ; I cannot lay hold of the entirely spiritual—the Infinite—the Eternal. The conception is too great, too difficult, too overwhelming for me to deal with ; nor can I draw from it the sustaining power of which I stand in need. But Jesus, the Father's Image ! Him I can comprehend. To Him I can cleave. I can dwell on His gracious words and promises. I can think of His words of kindness, His tears of sympathy, His labours of love. I can remember the innumerable tokens of a compassion and love, strong in life and death, which many waters could not quench, neither could the floods drown. Am I to see in these the manifestation, the divinely authorized manifestation of God, of the Father ? Ah ! then, I can know God—trust God—rejoice in God—seeing and recognizing God in Christ. Though I see Him not, and no mortal eye can see Him, yet I can rest with confidence in the manifestation of Him, by "the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father."

Nor in all the universe of space, or throughout the whole history of time, is there token or record of any being who does so meet and satisfy the earnest longings of the human spirit, for an object of worship which it can at once understand and love and trust in, with the full approbation of reason. And there is none that is or may be so well-known to us as Jesus. There was a simplicity in His character in its moral aspects, which makes it easy of comprehension. Free from taint of moral pollution, there never was in Him any equivocal feeling or profession, any doubtful principle, any of that mixture of good and evil, which so often in the case of ordinary men renders it difficult to understand or to determine the character. The good in Him melted not, as too often it does in mankind, by slow and scarce perceptible degrees into evil, nor did evil pass away before the good. He was pure always—in

motive, in affection, in action. And what He was, the Evangelical narrative sets him forth to us, with a simplicity suited to the divine simplicity of His nature. What do we know of the Virgin, of Peter, Paul, or John, of their inner life, their feelings, principles, affections, compared to what we know of Jesus? Yea, and of these did we know more, that is, as they were on the earth, is it not according to all experience, and every sound view of human nature, that a more intimate knowledge, if it revealed to us much good, would also reveal to us a measure of sin and selfishness, which however, unhappily, intelligible to us, would repel instead of exciting love and trust? Whereas every revelation of the inner life of Jesus deepens our reverence for His perfect purity, and gives increased ground of confidence in His unspeakable tenderness. Assuredly of all the corruptions which have crept into the worship of the Church, none is more unreasonable than that which seeks the mediation of Saints or Angels, with that Great High Priest, who is still, even in His glory, touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Of all we know in earth and heaven, His heart is the most loving—His ear most open—His hand the readiest and the mightiest to save.

Think not then, O thou weary and discouraged who art seeking after God, if haply thou mayest feel after Him and find Him; think not to comprehend the invisible Father, except through the manifestation of Him, by the only begotten Son, which is in His bosom. In Him, along with the portraiture of a perfect humanity, there was given an intelligible exhibition of the moral nature and attributes of the Godhead. Speak not any more of God as did the Patriarch of old, "O that I knew where I might find Him." Thou hast found Him in the Son, who is His Image. Let then thy heart go forth towards Him who is so revealed, in holy and confiding love. Does the word of exhortation fall without constraining influence or power, on many a listless ear and on many a cold heart? It may be so. "But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them

that are lost : in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the Image of God, should shine unto them." In the long course of the Church's history, there have ever been those who rejected Christ, seeing in Him no form, nor comeliness, nor any beauty that they should desire Him. But there have been also unnumbered multitudes whose hearts the love of Christ had penetrated, and who gave themselves to Him with unreserved devotion of soul and spirit. And so there still are. Not in vain, has the Kingdom of Heaven been set up on earth. Not in vain, has God given unto Jesus a name which is above every name. Over all the world and in every section of the Christian Church, there are those who can and do express the genuine feeling of their souls in the language of the Apostle: "Lord thou knowest all things ; thou knowest that we love thee." Heaven is thronged with those who in their earthly pilgrimage did so feel and speak. And not till we can do so, shall we be meet to join them.

III.

CHRIST THE LIVING SAVIOUR AND LORD.

HEBREWS XII. 2.

Looking unto Jesus.

CHRISTIANITY coincides with other religious systems in this; that it lays down certain propositions which it requires its disciples to *believe*, and certain moral duties which it requires them to *perform*. But it differs very remarkably from other religious systems, in this; that in addition to such faith in its revelations and such obedience to its moral code, it requires that continual trust and dependence be exercised in its author as a great ever living and all powerful Being. And it is to this difference, with a view to certain conclusions which as it appears to me may be drawn from it, partly doctrinal and partly practical in their nature, that I wish now to call your attention.

The difference is a very plain and obvious one. Take Judaism, for example, and compare it in this respect with Christianity. It was introduced by Moses, whose character is perhaps the greatest described in the Old Testament. A man of learning, a man of piety, a soldier, a statesman, a prince, a prophet, a legislator, he stands pre-eminent in the history of the Church of God, for the marks of the divine favour which he received, and the great and enduring effects which his labours were the means of accomplishing. By his instrumentality, the law moral, municipal and ceremonial, was given to the Jewish people, that polity and system of religion and morals which impressed upon the Jews a character, that still, after the lapse of four thousand years, eighteen hundred of which have been spent in dispersion from their own land, continues to distinguish them

from all the race of man. It was natural that such a man should be regarded with admiration and reverence. In point of fact, the successive generations of the Jewish people have so regarded him. Nor, is it to any sincere and enlightened Jew a matter of doubt, that he who led the fathers of the Jewish race to the borders of the earthly, is now himself a dweller in the heavenly Canaan, and enjoying "the recompense of the reward," to which we have been told, he had respect while upon the earth. But it is no part of the theory of Judaism, to make Moses an agent in any measure or degree *now*, in the dealings of God with his people, or to claim for him, now that he has left the world, any measure of regard or trust. Neither in actual fact, has it been the result of Judaism to produce any such trust or dependence on him who introduced it to the world, as if his power or personal interference in the affairs of the Church or of the world, were to be at all regarded or expected. The Mosaic institute is perfectly independent of any living agency on the part of him who communicated it to the Jewish people. It does not contemplate any such agency. It is on the contrary, in its whole tenor and spirit, abhorrent of, and opposed to, any such notion, or to the feelings to which such a notion is fitted to give rise in the minds of those who might cherish it. Moses was a man—distinguished indeed—but only a man. When he died, his work on earth was done. Henceforth, in their regard or disregard to his system of religion and law, the Jews had to deal with God alone. They looked for no mediation or interposition, no exercise of power for good or for evil, on the part of Moses. His interference in human affairs was at an end. And any trust or dependence on him, would, both according to the theory of Judaism and the actually entertained opinions of its adherents, have been a species of idolatry in every way deserving of condemnation. Not unto Moses, distinguished as his place was, under the Old Testament economy, was the believer of old enjoined to "look" i... his way to the

heavenly Zion. Then it was: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else."

But there have been teachers of morals and religion, other than those mentioned either in the Old Testament or the New, and who by their teaching have made a profound and lasting impression on the world. The difference which I have named as existing between Christianity, as a religious system, and the moral and religious systems introduced by these, is as marked as in the case of Judaism. Take for example the teaching of Socrates, the Athenian, certainly the wisest and most enlightened of all the Heathen world. The substance of his teaching, on the great subjects of religion and morals, has been preserved to us, by two illustrious disciples, both most affectionately attached to his person, and one of whom stands at the head of the literature and philosophy of ancient Greece. It was given to this great man to expound and illustrate the arguments for the being of God, and the immortality of the soul, with a clearness and cogency which have never been surpassed. And these great truths he appears to have held, not as speculative opinions, but with a depth and sincerity of conviction, which sustained him in the most trying circumstances, and furnished him consolation in his last moments. He expounded too, and enforced the great duties binding on men as members of society, with a simplicity and purity, which no other uninspired teacher has equalled. The account of his death at the hands of a fickle and tyrannical people, is one of the most interesting and pathetic narratives which all antiquity has left us. It was natural that such a man, standing out so conspicuously for moral wisdom, in the darkness of heathenism, should attract the profound regard and reverence of those who were able rightly to appreciate his character and his instructions. And there are abundant tokens of such regard and reverence. But what we have specially to observe is the entire separation between the moral and religious teaching of

Socrates, and himself. That teaching, the conclusions reached in it, and established by argument, and the moral duties enjoined in it, and which commend themselves as of obligation to the natural conscience, is perfectly independent of him, now that he has departed from the world. It is reasonable to receive that which he established. It is right to observe the duties which he enjoined. But no one thinks, or ever did think, or had any cause from anything, either he or his disciples ever taught, to think, that in any perplexity, or difficulty, or trouble, or temptation, to which the receiving of such truths, or the observance of such duty might lead, any help was to be derived from the departed moralist, any power of his to be looked to, any interposition of his, to be expected. In this, the Gentile and the Jewish teachers, the Greek and the Hebrew, are precisely alike. They taught what it was given them to teach, the one in the exercise of his natural powers of reason and understanding, and the other, by the express revelation of God. And then their work was done. They left their testimony, and their disciples had to do with that. But from their spirits, disentangled from the body, and received into the unseen world, they hoped nothing, they feared nothing. With truth and duty they had to do. With the departed expositors of these they had nothing to do. As living powers and agencies, to be regarded or confided in or appealed to, they had, in as far as men were concerned, passed away for ever.

Take again the religious system of the false prophet Mahomet. In that system, which has prevailed for so many hundred years, and which still prevails over a large portion of the earth, there is, as in Christianity, what professes to be the inculcation of religious truth and of moral duty. And no doubt a very great degree of reverence is claimed for Mahomet himself, as a messenger of God, and an expounder of his will; insomuch that the two propositions are constantly taught and affirmed together, as if they were of equal importance and equally incapable of

being disputed or doubted, that there is no God but God, and that Mahomet is his prophet. Yet all the regard claimed for this great prophet, in the religious system of which he is the author, now that he has departed, is regard and obedience to the truths and duties contained in the writings which he left behind him, and for which he claimed a divine authority. No doubt his followers believe him to be in a high place of honour and happiness with God ; but they are not taught to look, nor do they look to him, as their helper and refuge in trouble and in difficulty. It is not from him they seek succour. It is not in him they trust. To do so, would equally in their apprehension, as in the case of the Jews in respect of their great Lawgiver, be to withhold from the great God the honour which is due to Him, and idolatrously and impiously to lavish it on a creature.

Now, Christianity might have been, in this respect at least, what these various systems are. It is perfectly easy to conceive it so. Our Lord taught religious truth, and enjoined moral duty, and He might have done no more. And had He done no more, He would still have stood unspeakably above all other teachers, not only uninspired, with whom we would not desire to bring him into comparison, but with the most highly favoured of inspired teachers themselves. He spoke more clearly on the great points, on which it concerns the present happiness and the everlasting well-being of men to be informed. And He spoke with higher and better evidence of His divine mission. Both in respect of the subjects of His teaching, and the authority with which he spoke, the centurion's saying was true,—“Never man spake like this man ;” and what Christianity may thus readily be conceived to have been, while yet retaining its divine authority and a large and indisputable excellence, there are, who would fain make it out to be. They are prepared to say to its great author, with Nicodemus of old : “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God ; for no man can do these miracles which thou doest, except God be with him.” And they are willing to

receive His testimony concerning the Father, and concerning the life to come, and concerning the resurrection of the body, and concerning the sum of human duty, as the testimony of one who came from God to bear witness of the truth, and whose testimony, it is, therefore, binding on all men to receive. But here they stop short. Nowise disputing that in that life which Jesus revealed, he exists himself, and that in a state of transcendent glory and honour, they yet imagine that it is with his testimony, not himself, that we have now to do, that the reverence which we bear to him should be simply such as is due to the divinity of his mission and the purity of his character, and that he stands in no other relation to his followers than that of a teacher and pattern, who has done his work, and departed to his reward.

But what Christianity can readily be conceived to have been, and what Christianity is conceived by some to be, is it really? Is it nothing more? Is Christ only a Prophet of higher character than those who went before Him in the exercise of the prophetic office, revealing truth somewhat more clearly, and revealing somewhat more of truth than they did? This will never be admitted by those who read the New Testament with a candid spirit, and who are willing to submit their minds to its teaching. Christ is spoken of as a Priest, as well as a Prophet. And a Priest is one who not only teaches truth, but who interposes between God and the people, offering sacrifice and making intercession. He is represented as the one mediator between God and man. And throughout all Scripture, the Old Testament Scriptures which predicted His coming, and the New Testament Scriptures which record his history and explain the views of his disciples, his sufferings and death are connected with the salvation of men, and represented as having a bearing upon, and an efficacy in procuring that salvation, of which there is not the slightest appearance in regard of the sufferings and death of any other of the servants of God, even the

holiest and the most highly favoured. All this—all connected with the doctrine of the atonement, the doctrine of the substitution of Christ for sinners, the doctrine that God's righteous government admits not of pardon being granted to the sinner without a reason—that God's most tender love to the sinner could not go forth in exercise, except through the medium of an expiation for sin,—undoubtedly separates the Christian system from all other religious systems, and in the extent to which it is apprehended and received, draws towards Christ Himself, the Author and Finisher of our Faith, an amount and degree of regard and reverence to which no other teacher of truth, however, important, could possibly lay claim. It is not for truth taught alone that Christ is to be regarded and revered. It is for a work done, it is for an agony endured, it is for an expiation made, it is for a redemption purchased. We may and must reverence Him as the great teacher of the Church, the light which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world. But it is a profounder emotion which must be experienced, an emotion of lively and unceasing gratitude, when we contemplate Him as the Benefactor, the Deliverer, the Saviour, to an extent, which neither our views of the evil of sin in itself and its consequences, nor our partial knowledge of the glory and blessedness of complete and final disenthralment from its bondage, enables us adequately to conceive.

Even this vast difference in the Christian system from all other religious systems, which does of necessity attract towards Christ personally and independent of His testimony as a messenger from God, the highest admiration and love of those who truly receive the Gospel, might be conceived to have existed, apart from that peculiarity in the Christian system, to which it is the special object of this discourse to call attention. We can conceive that there might not only be a testimony to be delivered, but a work to be done, a sacrifice to be offered, and yet that after these were all accomplished, then the agency of Christ

might have ceased, and the feeling, the sole feeling required of His followers, have been, in addition to faith in His testimony and obedience to His precepts, gratitude for His interposition, such gratitude as we feel and delight to cherish towards a departed benefactor, a benefactor who had ceased to have the power to bless, but whose past benefits we could never forget. But is it so? Is it thus we are taught to think of Christ in the New Testament? Is it thus that the apostles and the early believers did think and feel in regard of Him? Did they count Him in his glory either unmindful of His followers on the earth or unable to aid them? Was it gratitude only to a departed benefactor which they claimed for Christ, or was it not also loyalty and affiance to him, as a living and loving Saviour, trust in and dependence on Him, as having all power in heaven and on earth, and exercising that power for the good of those who believed in His name.

Why, let any one read the New Testament, and the answer is plain. The regard of the disciples towards their great Master, their looking to Him, their trusting in Him, their expectations from Him, were in no wise altered by His death, or by His departure from them, when He ascended into heaven from the Mount Olivet, or only altered into a more intense regard and a more entire confidence, inasmuch as they knew and believed that God had "set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and had put all things under His feet, and given Him to be head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who filleth all in all." They regarded Him not as a Prophet alone, nor as a Priest alone, but as a King—a King ruling over all—a King subduing his people to himself and restraining and conquering all his and their enemies—a King whose authority was ever in exercise, whose help they could always claim, on whose power they might confidently rely. It was not, in regard of the Gos-

pel, only the true testimony of a departed prophet. No; nor only the great sacrifice which had been offered, or its blessed efficacy unto the salvation of men. It was also the actually and continually exercised power of a living though unseen Saviour, which they contemplated; and constant trust and dependence in the power, not less than faith in the sacrifice, or the cordial reception of the testimony of Jesus, was necessary to constitute a Christian of the primitive age.

It is this peculiarity in Christianity, both in the theory of it, and in the actual feelings of believers as called forth towards Christ, which gave rise, and which gives importance, to the questions that have been raised concerning the person of Christ. Had we only the doctrine of Christ to look to, the sole question would be its truth, the authority by which He spoke, and the evidence of His divine mission; and comparatively speaking, it would be a matter of little consequence, a matter not immediately affecting our peace or well being, who He was, or is, or whether His nature was human, or angelic, or supra-angelic or divine. The truth of the testimony would in that case be the main thing. But it is a different matter altogether, when we are not only to rely on the testimony, but to trust now, to trust ever, to trust in life and death in Him who gave the testimony. Are we like St. Paul to commit to Him the keeping of our souls,—the keeping of them even to the day of the judgment. Are we in the whole conduct of life to labor that we be accepted and approved of Him, to labor as under His eye, and whatsoever we do, to do it heartily unto Him? In trial and temptation are we to look to Him for sympathy and succour? Is it His interposition which is to cause all the dispensations of Providence to work together for our good? Is it He who is to send forth the spirit for our conversion and quickening? Is it He who is to walk with us through the valley and shadow of death? Is it in short—leaning on Him, like the Spouse in the song, leaning on Him, the great, the merciful, though unseen

Saviour, that we are to go up through the wilderness of this world, and enter through the gloomy portal of death into the wonders of another? Is this to be our attitude, amidst all the toils and the arduous labour of the Christian race, "looking unto Jesus" looking off, as the original word means, off and away from all other things and other persons unto Jesus, then surely are we interested to know who He is to whom such regard is to be paid, in whom such confidence is to be placed. We must not only receive His, as true testimony, but read in the testimony, the nature and the character of Him who delivered it.

And there, there may be read the Humanity alike and the Divinity of the Saviour. It is indeed, I am persuaded, the amount of regard and love and trust and reliance which is to be exercised towards Christ himself, which is obviously required in the Scripture to be exercised towards Him, and which was actually exercised towards Him by the Apostles and the primitive believers,—so very different, from what had been ever required by or rendered to any other messenger of God, and so difficult, in the supposition of our Lord's simple humanity, to reconcile with the dependence that is to be placed in God, and the intolerance of the Scriptures of all idolatrous regard to the creature, which prepares the minds of believers for acquiescing in the plain declarations of our Lord's Divinity. That seems necessary to reconcile everything in the Christian system; to make the duty claimed to Christ, in harmony with the duty which we owe to God. It is the sentiment not of one passage, but of all the New Testament, that men are to honour the Son even as they honour the Father. But how should or could this be done rightly and innocently, or without grievous derogation from the honour and glory of the eternal Father, were it not that the Father and the Son are, as Christ Himself said one; and could not the believer "looking into Jesus" say to Him with Thomas after his doubts had been removed, "my Lord and my God."

This conclusion—of the divine nature of our blessed Lord—is one which I was desirous of bringing out of this subject. I have only another, and that is entirely practical in its nature. If Christianity requires this continual regard to and dependence on Christ, as a living and almighty though unseen Saviour—if so to look to Christ and to trust in Him be as necessary as it is to believe His words, or to obey His commandments—if this is in short an essential element of true personal Christianity, then it behoves us to enquire whether it belongs to us ; whether we, in the actual conduct of life, are giving such regard to and exercising such trust in the Saviour ?

This is a matter which it cannot be very difficult to ascertain. A child is not unconscious—at least, he becomes vividly conscious whenever his attention is called to the subject, of his continual trust in his parents—his constant reference to their authority—his dependence on the exercise of their power in his behalf. A servant is perfectly conscious of the power of his master and of the homage which in various forms he is ever rendering to it. Yes, and we can all be perfectly conscious of such homage of trust, dependence and obedience, when the person exercising the power is absent, unseen, and perhaps in such circumstances, that we can never hope to see him. In this respect, even in common and wordly matters, we walk often by faith and not by sight. Such homage then do we render unto Christ ? Is He present to our minds habitually—not merely as a departed worthy—or as a departed benefactor—but as an ever living Saviour and Lord ? Do we not only regard the testimony, but the deliverer of it ? Do we not only look to the Saviour on the cross, bearing the burden of the world's transgressions, but to the Saviour on His throne guiding the destinies of the world ? Have we such regard to the Saviour that we take His will as our rule ? Have we such trust in His ready sympathy and His ever present and watchful care, and His supreme and irresistible au-

thority, that in every season of temptation we look as it were instinctively to Him for help, and in every time of trouble we look to Him for consolation, and in every time of perplexity we look to Him for guidance? Is Christ in short, to us, the memory of one who is departed, or is He a living being, with whom, though unseen, in virtue of His divinity we have every moment to do, and in whom we do continually exercise trust? These are questions which affect the very foundation of our claim to personal Christianity. Christians are not mere believers in abstract truth, however important it be. They are servants of a great Master. They are subjects of a great King. And in their hearts, there must be ever the sentiment of loyal affiance to Him, who though He was once the man of sorrows and acquainted with griefs, and has now departed from among us, and shall appear no more until the revelation of all things, when He shall come in the clouds of heaven and every eye shall see Him, is yet Ruler of all, and Head above all; at whose name every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth, and of whom every tongue should confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

IV.

THE SPIRITUAL KINDRED OF CHRIST.

ST. MATTHEW XII, 46-50.

While he yet talked to the people, behold his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, behold thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, who is my mother? And who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples and said, behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

IT is said of our blessed Lord in the Epistle to the Hebrews, that He is "the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of His person." And in the days of His humiliation, meek though he was and lowly in heart, He hesitated not to say, "Whoso hath seen me, hath seen the Father." Therefore are we entitled to point to Jesus as the revealer of the Godhead. Therefore, may we most certainly look for the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." Therefore, do we turn with eager eye to the recorded life of the Saviour, for the manifestation of that divine attribute of love, through the believing apprehension of which alone, the sinful soul can find just ground of peace or hope.

But Jesus was the Son of man as well as the Son of God. The same Epistle to the Hebrews which speaks of Him in the exalted terms I have just mentioned, does also declare, that "He became partaker of flesh and blood," "He took on Him," says St. Paul, "the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men." There was thus a two-fold nature in the Saviour. There was the divine, which had been in the beginning with God, and was God. And there was the human, which at the season appointed

in the counsels of heaven, was born of that Virgin Mother, of low estate, but lofty lineage, whom as the highly favoured of the Lord, all generations have agreed to call blessed. And in this human nature, Jesus was the exemplar and model of all virtues proper to men. Every holy temper, every good affection dwelt in Him, the Holy One of God, whose mission on earth was not only to reveal what God is, but to show also what man should be. He is the perfect example, in whose steps it behoves all to walk.

And amidst the virtues of His all perfect character, we may be sure, that of filial piety was neither absent nor wanting in depth and in tenderness. In proportion, indeed, to the capacities of goodness in a man's nature, is his sense of maternal love—and through all life, the willing tribute rendered to it of grateful and reverential affection. Nor may we doubt, that to Mary herself and to the brethren, with whom the Saviour associated in one home, before His public work on earth had begun, there did ever flow forth from Him, that regard and love, suitable to the relations in which they were placed to one another. And if that regard and love be warm, and tender, and trustworthy and abiding, even in those whose hearts are defiled with sin and selfishness, how unspeakably more of all these qualities must have distinguished the filial and fraternal affection of Him, who was free from every taint of sin, and in whose holy nature, love dwelt and reigned, unchecked and unthwarted by the power of an evil passion, or the presence of an evil thought. There is indeed a just place to such affection in man's nature, beyond which it cannot pass, without disturbing the balance of virtues in it, and marring the general excellence of the character. And there are passages in the history of Jesus, which show that warm and tender as was such affection in Him, this due limit was set to the exercise of it. It was not permitted to take the place of higher principles. It was not permitted to call away from the discharge of sacred duties. The earthly mother might not claim the authority of the

heavenly Father, or expect that her wishes should stand in competition with His work. "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" was a gentle yet decided assertion of higher claims than even a mother could establish—an acknowledgment of these claims, and a ready submission to them.

Yet, under such restrictions, with such limitations, how blessed and how precious a thing must not the filial and fraternal love of Christ have been! How warm, how pure, how free from all self-seeking; how generous and self-sacrificing it must have been! And then the love of a Being, so exalted by His perfect moral excellence; so exalted by His designation to the highest offices, under the divine government of the world; so exalted by His triumph over moral evil, in most tempting wise suggested to His mind; so exalted by the possession of power and wisdom, such as His public ministry daily exhibited to that perverse generation which hated Him for the very perfection of His goodness, who can over estimate, or reach rather to a right and just estimate of the worth and preciousness of such affection. It is in the nature of woman to regard with affection, that comes at last to be reverential, truthful, humble, the noble and virtuous manhood of the child she has nursed at her bosom, and who was once dependent every moment on her care, and obedient to every intimation of her will. And such must have been the affection of her who was blessed among women, to the great Being who stood to her in a relation of such sacredness, and yielded to her the love which the relation claimed, not only throughout all life, but even in the very agonies of death, when He commended her, with solemn earnestness to the care and tenderness of His best loved disciple.

The filial love of Jesus is a trait in His human character which all can appreciate. Who would not desire to have been the object of love, like in degree, from a Being so exalted? Who would not desire to stand to Him in a

relation claiming such special interest and tenderness, as that of the kinsmen who stood without with Mary desiring to speak with Him? Who is not ready to say that would have been pledge indeed, of a love unequalled in purity and tenderness? Who is not ready to look with something approaching to envy on the privilege of those who stood to Him, in relations so sacred and endearing? O, had we but seen Him; had we been permitted to dwell with Him and associate with Him; had we known Him as the elder brother; had we looked from day to day on that benign countenance, which no turbulent or unruly passion ever ruffled; had that loving eye beamed on us and that sacred hand been laid upon us, and that voice of melting tenderness been familiar to our ear; and we could count on the close, the special, the indelible relation which bound Him to those who were His kinsmen and His brethren, according to the flesh; O how great would have been the honour, how unspeakable the comfort and the advantage, how sure would be our ground of trust, and how safe should we be under His protection.

Do you indeed desire to stand in such relation to the Saviour? Have you indeed learned to appreciate the greatness of His character, and to feel the importance of being united to Him, and having claim to the forthputting of His power and tenderness on your behalf? Has it ceased to be with you, as it was with the unbelieving Jews, under the ministry of Jesus, who saw in Him no form nor comeliness, nor any beauty, that they should desire Him? Has it ceased to be with you, as it is with multitudes still, by whom, under a profession of reverence for His divine character and mission and authority, He is practically rejected and despised? Would you like to have the love of Christ to trust to and to rejoice in? Would you like to know and believe that the love of Christ to you, is as warm and as tender and as much to be relied on, as if you had stood to Him in the closest of earthly relationships; as if you had lived under the same

roof, and sat at the same table, and been associated for years in the occupations and enjoyments of the same home ? Would you be as sure of love to you existing in that Blessed One, who though He hath entered within the veil, and is now at the Father's right hand in the heavenly sanctuary, is the same in the tenderness of His nature, as when He was a man of sorrows upon the earth ? Would you be as sure, I say, of love to you existing in Him, as you are sure there was love in His heart to the weeping mother, who stood by the cross, when He said to John : " Behold thy Mother " ; yes, and even such love as He bore to her ? Is this an object of desire ? Is this what it would satisfy your utmost wishes to possess ? Is this what would fill your souls with the joy that is unspeakable and full of glory ? Then, listen to the text ! Listen to the Saviour speaking in these sacred words ! Listen,—not as you may have often done before without interest, or without an effort to realize the full meaning of what He says,—the full import of what is promised in the emphatic words, which He used, when stretching forth his hand towards his disciples—He said : " Behold My mother and My brethren ! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother."

There is a twofold love of Christ described in the Scriptures, and which it is quite possible for us to distinguish. One is the love of pity, of compassion, not founded on moral qualities in those who are the objects of it, but existing independent of them. That is the love which prompted the Saviour to undertake the cause of us sinful creatures. That is the love which prompted Him to leave the glory which he had with God before the world was, and to become partaker of flesh and blood. That is the love which moved Him to endure the contradiction of sinners against Himself, to endure the agony of the garden and of the cross. That is the love, which prompted those words of pleading tenderness with which, still, as in the first ages, he warns, entreats and encourages sinful and suffering men to

come to Him. That is the love which is the prime ground of hope and comfort to every believing soul. That is the love, in the faith of which the preacher of the word must bear His message to men. And the existence of it and the greatness of it, form the very burden of that message itself. Jesus pities thee; O! thou sinful man, Jesus loves thee. Jesus would not have thee perish in thy sins. He is stretching out his arms to receive thee to His mercy. To save thee, he endured the agony of the garden and of the cross. He would have thee come to him, poor and wretched and blind and naked as thou art, and He will do all for thee. He will pardon. He will sanctify. He will save. Thou canst have no access to the Highest but through him. But trusting in Him, the way is open for thee even to the Paradise of God. And washed, and justified and sanctified, thou mayst yet appear among the blessed that are around the Throne.

But there is a special love of Christ, not thus universal in the objects of it, not thus independent of moral qualities existing in the objects of it, but confined to those in whom such moral qualities exist. This is a love arising from congeniality of nature, from community of sentiment and affection, from moral approbation, from a perception of qualities deserving and calling forth love. What if Christ impart these qualities! What, though it be the work of His Spirit that they exist in the extent to which they exist in any soul! What, though the faith of His divine compassion be the very source and fountain of them all? What, though they express but faintly and imperfectly the image of Christ himself! Faint and imperfect though such image be, compared with the Divine original, even in the soul of the most advanced believer, yet of all things in the world, it is the best deserving to be loved. And Christ, who judges ever righteous judgment, and values all things according to their true nature, cannot fail to love it, and to love those in whom it is. The existence of it—the existence of Christ's image in the soul—constitutes a

binding relationship to Him, stronger and more enduring than that constituted by any tie of blood or of earthly kindred. They, in whom such image is, are the spiritual kindred of the Saviour, and He prefers them to all others. "Who is my mother," said He, "and who are my brethren?" And He stretched forth His hand toward His disciples and said: Behold my mother and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother."

In these words, you have the character drawn shortly, but faithfully and sufficiently, of the disciples of Christ, and you have declared the honour and blessedness of being disciples.

First, I say, you have the character, drawn in few but faithful and sufficient words, of the disciples of Christ. They are such as do the Father's will. In the corresponding passage in the Gospel of St. Luke, they are such as hear the word of God and *do* it. A description this, nowise inconsistent with others in the sacred word, which give repentance, or faith, or love of Christ, as the token of discipleship. For the Father's will embraces each and all of these. God would have all men everywhere to repent. It is the wish of God that we should believe in His Son Jesus Christ. It is the word of God, that whoso loveth not Christ is Anathema, Maranatha. But it is on obedience to God's will, that our Saviour dwells as being the end of all, the main thing sought by His teaching, and by His work, without which all other things, if they could exist separate from it, would be vain; and to which all other things are only valuable as leading. He makes obedience to the Father's will the token of discipleship, to shew the vanity of a profession without practice, the vanity of a repentance that is not followed with reformation, the vanity of a faith, which without works is dead, the vanity of any religious excitement, which terminates not in sober and self-denying submission to the will of God. All the means needful to produce such submission—such moral conformity to God's

will—it would be wrong to suppose that our Saviour meant either to contest or to disparage. In proportion to the value of the end desired is the value of the means necessary to the attainment of it. Yet must not the means be placed above the end, or spoken or thought of, as if they possessed an inherent and independent virtue. All the duties connected with the truth,—hearing it, receiving it, remembering it, professing it,—are but preparatory to the great end of obeying it. It is a sentence familiar to us from our very childhood, but which it is of the last importance to have continually in our remembrance: “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”

Wouldst thou then try thyself by this description of Christ's disciples, and test thereby thine own discipleship? Consider first, whether thou art careful to know God's will. It can hardly be thought thou hast much concern about doing God's will, if thou art not at pains to know what it is He would have thee do. Some knowledge of His will thou hast engraven in thy very heart. Thou canst not shake thyself free of it. But thou hast the word of God also by thee, shewing clearly what God would have thee to do. Is then that word of His in thy hands? Art thou concerned to know what it says? The statute book of the kingdom, is it thy daily study? Christ speaks of His disciples, as they who *hear* the word of God. To *hear* it from His lips was the privilege of the first disciples. To read it, from the book in which it is written down, is the privilege of disciples now. Dost thou avail thyself of this privilege, or is the word of God, of all books, that which thou studiest least, and art the slowest to take up? This will give plain enough token, that thou art not yet of the spiritual kindred of Christ,—not yet of those of whom He says: “Behold my mother and my brethren!” But secondly, consider whether thou art careful to practise what thou knowest. There is a vast importance attached

to this, even should thy knowledge be far short of what it should be. For doing what we know, is the step—the most sure step—to knowing more. Doing the will of God, in so far as it is known to us, our Saviour makes the preparation for becoming His true and genuine disciples in all things. “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” How is it with thee, then, in this respect? Art thou from day to day wounding, resisting the conscience which God has put in thee? Art thou from day to day, neglecting what thine own heart and God’s word agree in teaching thee thou shouldst do; or doing what they teach thee, thou shouldst not do? Dost thou choose thine own will, and not the Father’s will? Then again thou canst not be of the spiritual kindred of the Saviour, nor canst thou rank thyself among those of whom he said: “Behold my mother and my brethren.”

No doubt, all moral good or evil is in the heart, in the inward feelings and disposition of the man. Words and actions are but the exponents of the inward temper and disposition. God looks into the heart; and He can discern and judge its state, without regard to external practice, for he knows every motive that has power over it. He knows every feeling that dwells in it. And He can see, amidst all the complication of motives which tells upon a man’s conduct, which is the real, the chief, the governing, the actuating one. And we can look into the heart too; not into our neighbours, but into our own. And we may by the study of the heart—the thoughts that are habitual to us—the feelings and affections that are habitual to us—come to a judgment of its true state. Nor should we be justified in failing so to judge of ourselves, though it is not given us, thus to judge our neighbour. But after all such study and investigation of internal motives and principles, it is wise and safe to come to practice; to come to what our Lord here fixes our chief attention upon—the *doing* of the Father’s will. It is what we may call a

rougher way of coming to a judgment, less refined and philosophical, but on the whole the safest, and will prevent much self delusion. Good feelings are at the foundation of all good. But we are mightily in danger of deceiving ourselves about these same good feelings, if not about the reality of them, at least the strength of them, the value of them. Take now the second table of the law, as sacred in its authority as the first, as valid, as binding on every child of man. Take the love of our neighbour. "Why I wish him very well," a man may say: "I feel nothing but kindness to him, in his distress and difficulty. I heartily pity him. I have the most genuine sympathy with him. Poor man my heart bleeds for him." There is no consciousness of insincerity in this. There *is* no insincerity. The man is not pretending to a feeling which he has not. He is expressing a feeling which he really has. Under the consciousness of this, he feels himself to be very charitable and kind, and thinks he is yielding obedience to the law of love. But though there may be no insincerity, there may be great self delusion. The man may be utterly mistaken, not as to the existence of the sentiment, but as to the strength of it, and the value of it. An easy way to test them is simply to come to practice, to get out of the region of feeling into that of action, and to consider what you are ready to do or to give this object of benevolence and sympathy. What trouble will you take for him? What exertion will you make for him? Ah! the tree is known best by its fruits. Even our own hearts we shall judge most safely, and with least chance of error, by taking into very full consideration, the kind of conduct in regard of God and man, to which they prompt. The heart cannot be all right if the conduct be all wrong, And assuredly we can never be Christ's disciples unless we are "*doing* the Father's will." This is what Christ set us an example of. He knew the Father's will. He did it—did it always—did it perfectly—did it cheerfully. It was His wish to do it. It was with Him a necessity. It was with Him a

pleasure. In the volume of the book it is written of Him.—as the expression of His ruling principle—"I delight to do Thy will, O my God ; yea, thy law is within my heart." And, in a measure, so it is with all His disciples. They reach not here the perfection of the great Master ; but they aspire to it. They tend towards it. They make progress towards it. They die daily unto sin, and live unto righteousness. They are like the morning light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. Is this thy state and condition, O professing Christian ? Has thy faith in the love of Christ to sinners, and His work for them, and His promises to them, of free and full salvation, wrought in thee such temper and disposition ? Amidst all the sins and shortcomings, which thou hast reason to deplore, and for which thou dost daily mourn and daily ask forgiveness, art thou conscious of growing in inclination and in strength, to *do* the Father's will ? Then, Christ doth own thee one of His family—of His kindred ; thou art nearer to His heart than any relationship of blood and lineage could ever have made thee. Thou art more the object of His regard, than any early association or domestic intimacy could have made thee. It was a natural exclamation for the woman, while listening to the words of grace and wisdom which were falling from the lips of Jesus : "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the breasts which thou hast sucked." But what was the judgment of Jesus himself ? "Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." And this is thy blessedness, this is thine honour, O Christian disciple, who being a disciple not in name only, but in deed and truth, art doing the Father's will. To thee and such as thee, Jesus doth still stretch out His hand saying as of old : "Behold my mother and my brethren ! For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother." "Note," says an old commentator on this passage, "All obedient believers are near akin to Jesus Christ. They wear His

name, bear his image, have his nature, are of his family. He loves them, owns them, converses freely with them, as his relations. He bids them welcome to his table, takes care of them, provides for them, sees that they want for nothing that is fit for them: When he died he left them rich legacies: Now he is in heaven, he keeps up a correspondence with them, and will have them all with him at last, and will in nothing fail to do the kinsman's part, nor will ever be ashamed of his poor relations, but will confess them before men, before angels, and before his Father."

Such honour have all his Saints. What honour or profit has the world to put in competition with this? Keep it in thy mind, lay it to thine heart, O, believer! Christ is thy brother, thy kinsman, thy friend. He regards thee with greater tenderness than any earthly relation claims or calls forth. He will stand by thee in thy trouble. He will walk with thee through the valley and shadow of death. He will own thee in the day when He cometh in the clouds of heaven. He will take thee with Him into the kingdom of the Father. Thou mayest be of God's hidden ones here below and the world know thee not, even as it knew Him not. But thou art known and acknowledged now as of the heavenly family, and as such thou shalt be known and acknowledged hereafter. O be concerned more and more to make thy calling and election sure; to have brightening evidence from day to day in exercises of piety and deeds of charity, that thou art indeed of the spiritual kindred of Jesus; that thou hast His image engraven on thy heart; that thou art a partaker of the nature that was in Him. And let this be thy motto, thy joy, thy comfort. "The Lord knoweth them that are his. Having loved His own, from the beginning, He loves them to the end."

And you who may not claim this special and distinguishing love of Christ—which yet we must all have if we would be His—and should have, if ever we become His; re-

member, I beseech you, that even to all sinful men, to all labouring and heavy laden, the heart of Christ is overflowing with compassion ; and this day His word to such is : "Come unto me. Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." If He sees not in you now the heart and lineaments of God's true children, He is willing to impart them. If now ye be in a state of condemnation, if hereafter a verdict of condemnation be pronounced on you, it will be, because ye would not come to Him that ye might have life. May God in mercy make you willing, that so you may yet be loved and cherished members of Christ's spiritual family, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ ; yea, and may this very day be memorable in your spiritual history, as the era from which you date a new and spiritual life.

V.

CHRIST'S MISSION ON EARTH.

ST. MATTHEW XX, 26, 27, 28.

Whoever will be great among you, let him be your minister, and whoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant, even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

NO one can fail to remark, while perusing the Gospel history, how ignorant and inapprehensive the disciples were, and long continued to be, of the spiritual nature of that kingdom of heaven, which Jesus was about to establish. The idea of a spiritual reign was new to them, foreign to all their habits of thinking, opposed to the universally entertained expectations of their countrymen, and inconsistent with the literal import of the prophetic Scriptures. Except by miracle, it could only be slowly and by degrees, that their minds could become able to take in so magnificent a conception, or to follow it out in its details, and in its distinction from the notions which they had previously entertained. And ultimately it was by a miraculous illapse of the Holy Spirit, that they were delivered from their former narrow and mistaken views, and made capable of comprehending the spiritual nature of the new dispensation. But, meanwhile, during our Lord's own personal ministry, though they received such lessons, from time to time, upon the subject, as should, it may seem, have opened their minds to right apprehensions of the truth—such lessons as still serve to convey to us clear ideas of the nature and character of Christ's kingdom on the earth—they remained to a great extent ignorant of the truth. And if it was so with them, we need not wonder that it was so with the mother of James and John ; that

her ambition, like theirs, was a worldly ambition ; or that in the request which she made to Jesus on behalf of her sons, she had no other desire than to secure for them temporal honours, the highest places of rank and authority, in what she imagined was to be a temporal kingdom.

We shall have less cause to be surprised at the dulness and incapacity of the disciples to comprehend the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom, if we consider not merely the character of their understandings, not rising above the ordinary level, and the imperfect training which they had of necessity received in a remote province, among a proud and bigoted people, and in the humble class of society to which they originally belonged ; but also the difficulty which we have ourselves to conceive the spiritual kingdom of Christ, notwithstanding its actual establishment and existence for so long a period in the world. The words "Kingdom" and "Reign" still most readily suggest to our minds, the symbols, the subjects, the instruments, the accessories of temporal sovereignty ; courts and councils, in which a king presides ; countries over which he rules ; tribute which he levies ; armies which he leads ; wars which he wages ; conquests which he makes ; the crown, the sceptre, the sword, emblems of a temporal rule on the one hand, and a temporal subjection on the other. It is not easy to put aside these notions, and to conceive of a kingdom, which though established in the world, is yet not of the world, nor akin in its character, aspect, and purpose to earthly kingdoms.

It requires a serious and sustained exercise of thought to contemplate Christ's kingdom, not that in Heaven, over the spirits of just men made perfect, nor that, of which the Scriptures speak, over all angels and men, but the kingdom which is actually established on earth. Amidst all the ignorance, sin and misery which yet prevail in the world, how real, how extensive, how great and growing a kingdom that is, though it be unsupported by material force, and far from having yet reached the measure of its predicted

and promised power and glory. It requires a serious and sustained exercise of thought to take into the mind, and realize the truth, that One, once a wandering prophet of righteousness in a remote province, contumeliously rejected by the mass of his countrymen, and finally crucified amidst the execrations of the people, now reigns supreme in the hearts of unnumbered multitudes ; to whom obedience is rendered, not from fear, nor even constraint of conscience, but from love ; and that an obedience not of the outward life only, but of the heart and the affections ; one whose name now transcends every name of dignity and honour, which men have agreed to reverence ; whose authority, though enforced by no visible power or temporal sanction, transcends all authority that is anywhere known among men ; who has subjects in every condition of mankind ; whose subjects are daily increasing ; whose right is acknowledged to rule in the minds and hearts of all ; and who does so rule, as to influence far more profoundly and permanently, the character and condition of mankind, than any earthly power can at all accomplish, regulating the inner life of those who are His true subjects, and largely affecting those also who may not be so considered.

There is much as yet undoubtedly wanting to complete in actual fact, the full idea of the kingdom of Heaven among men. It has not yet extended over all the space in which it is destined to bear sway. It has not yet enrolled all nations, or all of any nation, among its subjects. Those, who are its subjects, are often needlessly divided from one another, and see not nor acknowledge, the good there is in one another. And even the most loyal fail much and often in their allegiance and their duty. But yet with all these abatements, and notwithstanding all that is opposed to it, what has earth to shew in dignity or excellence, in power or promise, compared with the reign of Christ in men's hearts ? What has so effectually tamed the furious passions of men ? What has set us on so many noble enter-

prizes ? What has accomplished so much of good ? What has communicated so much of happiness ? What has given rise to so many noble impulses, or moved to so much of virtuous exertion ? What has imparted so much purity in life, or so much of hope in death ? Or what could so effectually darken all this world's prospects, and destroy the brightest hopes of its best inhabitants, as the extinction of this spiritual kingdom, the great Head of which is to man invisible, and all his words and promises, the objects only of that faith, which is the evidence of things not seen and the substance of things hoped for ? We talk much in our day of public opinion, and are prompt to defer to it, as if it must of necessity be a safe and right guide, forgetful that public opinion has sanctioned the most palpable follies, and the most atrocious wickedness ; that in enlightened Athens it sanctioned the execution of the most virtuous of the heathen sages, and approved in Jerusalem the crucifixion of Jesus. Let us rather think of Christian opinion, Christian sentiment—opinion and sentiment derived from the word and example of Christ ; and in whatever influence or authority they possess among men, we may discern the tokens and results of the reign of Christ upon the earth.

It is not however to the extent or paramount authority of Christ's Kingdom on the earth, that I would desire now to call your attention, but rather to the light thrown on the nature of that kingdom, by the authoritative declaration here given, as to what that is, which *in it* constitutes true greatness. Jesus had spoken on the subject before, when the disciples enquired who among them should be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and he had clearly enough intimated by the form of his answer, that not pride, or ambition, or the effects to which they prompt, not rank, not power, not intellectual pre-eminence, not courage in war, nor proficiency in the arts of peace, all of which have a high place in temporal kingdoms, would give eminence in His, but an humble spirit. "Who so shall humble himself as this little child, the same is

greatest in the kingdom of heaven." What He then said of a temper of mind, he says in the text of a habit of action, implying indeed humility, but implying also self-denying benevolence. "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister, and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant."

How different this is from what obtains in ordinary earthly kingdoms, our Lord Himself does specially notice. "Ye know," said he, "that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them, but it shall not be so among you." In ordinary kingdoms they who attain the chief place expect and constrain others to serve them. They require that their will be done, their inclinations consulted, their honour advanced, their happiness as much as possible increased. They are actuated by a regard to self, and gratify as much as in them lies, and in so far as the measure of their power extends, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life. This is their aim, and it gives the moral tone and character to all their proceedings, not the less that, in point of fact, they do serve others, and prove to be, without intending it, what Christians are, who choose and intend to be servants and ministers to the good of others. It is a token of the wise and overruling government of God, that men are not able to gratify their own selfish desires, without contributing some thing, often largely, to the general good. The ends of a benevolent government are thus secured, though these ends be not at all contemplated by those who serve them, but only small and selfish ends of their own. There are among those who exercise authority in earthly kingdoms, some no doubt, who are subjects of Christ's spiritual kingdom, and who in the very exercise of their temporal authority are guided by Christian principles. But Christ speaks here of the princes of the Gentiles—of those without the true religion, and the description we have given includes multitudes who have that religion only as a matter of speculation, and not of glad acceptance and willing submission.

But such is not the description of those who stand pre-eminent in the Kingdom of Christ. They are servants of all, and ministers of all. And they are so of deliberate choice and purpose, formed in a spirit of humility and of self-denying benevolence. In and to their choice and purpose they are guided by a great example, even the example of the Head of that spiritual kingdom itself, of which they are the subjects. The Son of man is the title by which our Lord did most choose to distinguish himself in the days of his humiliation. But He did not hesitate before the High Priest to avow himself the Son of the Blessed. One of his apostles testified of Him that He thought it no robbery to be equal with God, and another, that He was in the beginning with God, and was God. Yet He humbled himself. Yet He condescended to become partaker of flesh and blood, and to dwell among men. And when He did so condescend, He came not as a King or a Conqueror. He came not clothed in the splendour of earthly greatness to exercise a temporal authority over subject nations. He came in meek humility, claiming no temporal honour, asserting no temporal pre-eminence, his only claim to pre-eminence appearing in the desire not that others should serve him, but that he should be the servant of others, his claim to pre-eminence established by his unparalleled self-sacrifice in life and death. Throughout his toilsome and laborious life he pleased not himself, sought no private or selfish ends, but with universal beneficence, and even when enduring the contradiction of sinners against himself, sought to promote the spiritual and temporal good of all. That was his continual end and aim. The bright example He, of that love which was to be the distinguishing characteristic of his disciples, and the badge and token of their connection with Him, the love which is the end of the commandment and the fulfilling of the law. And the love and the self-sacrifice which appeared throughout his life, shone most brightly of all in his death. That, though it seemed to be brought about

only by the violent passions of wicked men, was the result of his own choice. No man could take his life from him. He had power to lay it down and power to take it up again. And when He did lay it down, amidst the desertion of friends, and the execrations and insults of his enemies, and bruised and wounded in spirit, unspeakably more than in the body, which was nailed to the cross, and pierced with a spear, it was in abounding grace and love, that the great sacrifice was made. It was for others he died, for sinful men then, for sinful men now, that he offered himself to God, and gave his life a ransom for many. His death was not the sad debt of nature, which all must sooner or later pay. It was not even the martyr's death constrained to choose between the surrender of life and principle. It was a voluntary offering for others, the crowning demonstration of divine and unparalleled love. Truly it appears from all the Gospel History, that "the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Was such self-denying benevolence the great characteristic of the Head of the kingdom of heaven on the earth, that which pre-eminently distinguished him, then it is plain that such kingdom was not to resemble the kingdoms of the world. It was to be a kingdom of a different kind, and its honours and rewards to be bestowed on other principles. That which the King valued and exemplified most himself, he would most value and approve in others. The greater the abnegation of self, the more complete and decided the reign of benevolence, the more promptly selfish ease, selfish ends and interests could be sacrificed for others, the more steadily and habitually the good of others, their temporal good and their spiritual good was contemplated, the greater claim there would of necessity be to consideration and honour in a kingdom, of which the Sovereign had come to the world, not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. Nor was it to be thought that any other

could be the law of such a kingdom and such a Sovereign, than that which is laid down in the text: "Whosoever will be great among you let him be your minister, and whosoever will be chief among you let him be your servant."

There are distinctions even in Christ's kingdom here. There will be distinctions in Christ's kingdom hereafter. That there shall be infinite variety even amidst great and strong resemblance seems to be a law of the Divine procedure in all things. How like in many things is one flower to another, but even in flowers of the same class, there is not one exactly and in all things like another. How like speaking generally is the human countenance in all, yet not even in members of the same family, is the countenance of one exactly and in all things like that of another. How like are the great features of the human character, the tempers, capacities, and desires of men, in all the race. As in water face answereth to face, so doth the heart of man to man. Yet are no two characters exactly, and in all respects, alike. And as it is with human character generally, so it is with Christian character in particular. There is a general resemblance in all true Christians, but there is infinite variety too; variety in knowledge, variety in attainment, variety formed from different opportunities of getting good, or of doing good, variety in the disposition to take advantage of such opportunities, variety in the strength of Christian principle, variety in the performance of Christian duty. All are not on a dead level here in Christ's kingdom below. All shall not be on a dead level in Christ's kingdom above. Variety gives a charm in the kingdom of nature. It imparts a charm to common society. It is not without its important uses in Christian society—where each, according to the measure of his gifts and graces, may find his proper work to do, and his fitting associates in the doing of it. Nor may we doubt that it will impart interest to the heavenly society, in which all, we know, shall not be alike, but some shall sit on thrones, judging

the tribes of the spiritual Israel, and "every one shall receive his own reward according to his own labour." But the distinctions in Christ's kingdom now and the distinctions in Christ's kingdom above are not such as will minister to the pride or the selfishness of the natural heart. They are the reward,—rather they are the pre-eminent existence—of the prime virtues of humility and benevolence. The humility and the benevolence constitute the distinction, rather than the ground of distinction.

But as the humblest, and the most self-denied and benevolent are the most distinguished in the kingdom of heaven, in the account, and according to the law and principle of judgment ordained by its great Head, and exhibited and sanctioned by his own illustrious example, so it is plain that to be subjects of that kingdom at all, it behoves that we be humble, and to others serviceable. I have had frequent occasion to speak of Christian humility—how excellent in itself, as according to the truth of things—and how excellent as a disposition, which prompts to seek, and makes willing to receive, and to which God has promised his heavenly grace. As well think to have light without the sun, as a Christian without humility. But now I would speak of actual usefulness. A Christian is a servant, a minister—another name for a servant. He is one who labours for others, whose heart is not engrossed with selfish aims and pursuits, but glows with social tenderness for all mankind, whose religion is not of that selfish kind which contemplates only his own salvation, but which has regard also for the moral and spiritual good of others ; who does not say in regard of any object or enterprise of benevolence, with the wicked Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?" but who gladly seeks to profit by and improve every opportunity of usefulness. I tell you, this disposition to serve, to minister, to be useful to others, useful in your day and generation according to the measure of your capacities and opportunities, useful when active exertion

is required, and useful when self-denial and sacrifice are required, is as essential to the Christian character, as necessary an attribute of a true and faithful subject of Christ's kingdom on earth, as is humility. A selfish Christian! a Christian taken up only with his own immediate interests! a Christian not prompt to minister to others, or not casting about to seek the means of usefulness in the world and in the Church, why the very idea is absurd. How should such a one be a follower or a subject of Him, who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

I desire to press this upon the consciences of all of us. It is not enough to have some religious knowledge. It is not enough to have some value for such knowledge. It is not enough to be at times the subject of religious emotions more or less deep and earnest. It is not enough to be humble, as Christ requires, and as is suitable to our state and character and condition. It is not enough to be strict in personal duties and honest and honourable in business transactions. It is not enough to be free from malice or revenge, or to have a general feeling of good will. All this does not constitute a servant or minister, one who follows the example of Him who went about continually doing good, and who gave his life a ransom for many. There must be active benevolence towards others. There must be active exertion for others. It must be an aim and object settled and constant to be useful, to grow in usefulness, to mark our course in the world by earnest and self-denying exertion for others. For such exertion there is always ample room. God has not made men to stand isolated and apart from one another. They need each other's aid. Who gives aid at one time, may need it at another. Who needs it now may be able to give it at some other time. And as Christians we are bound in a special manner to consider ourselves as brethren, and to act to one another as such. How shall we belong to the heavenly kingdom, Christ's kingdom, if we

would always have others serving and ministering to us, instead of ourselves serving and ministering to others? Is that to walk in the footsteps of the Son of man who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many?

There is a cold selfishness about many a one, who holds a respectable place in the world, and perhaps in the Church too, which is wholly inconsistent with the spirit of Christ. "I shall gain all I can, keep all I can, enjoy all I can, give nothing which I can withhold, do nothing for others that I can avoid, live to myself here, and get to heaven if I can at last, without regard to others." No one would say just that. But it is how many feel, and it does not mend the matter much, if in the gaining and keeping and enjoying and doing, a man takes in his own immediate connections, who are, as it were, only part of himself and from whom he cannot shake himself free. It is good that a man should do this, good that God has so made man, that he can scarcely, or seldom, help doing it; good that in-born selfishness is so far broken in upon, good that even in such and so limited a degree, a regard to others should be entertained: that even on so small a scale he should be constrained to be, and in some measure by choice and through natural affection, a servant and a minister unto some. But the spirit of Christ goes far beyond that. It is far wider in its regard for others, far more noble and generous and loving. And little indeed shall we understand the life of Him, whose servants we profess to be, if the believing contemplation serves not to melt and displace the cold selfishness of the world, and to substitute in its stead a spirit of warm and active and self-denying charity.

But whom am I to serve, to whom am I to minister? it may be said. To this, I answer: Wheresoever God gives thee opportunity, thou art to minister, to whomsoever thou canst be of real use thou art to be serviceable. Why should any one ask: Who is my neighbour? when Jesus hath told us that every one is our neighbour, to whom our

power of doing good extends. Let a man have in his heart the benevolence of the Gospel, active and self-denying, and he will not want objects or opportunities for bringing it into exercise, and only such exercise will prevent its dying away, and giving place to opposing and sluggish selfishness. There is a hatefulness and repulsiveness about all selfishness, our own selfishness when we can be made to see it, and others' selfishness which we are quick enough to discover and to condemn ; our own or others' selfishness in respect of anything. But I know not if it ever appears more hateful and repulsive, than when connected with a certain kind and degree of religion. Sometimes a man's religion consists in a simple desire to save his soul, or to have it saved, as if any miserable soul could be saved, that cared only for itself in time or in eternity ; as if salvation did not very mainly mean deliverance from that very selfishness, and the implanting of a higher principle of love ; supreme love to God, and love to our neighbour as ourselves.

VI.

THE DOCTRINE OF REWARD.

ST. MATTHEW X, 41, 42.

He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward ; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man, shall receive a righteous man's reward ; and whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

SUPPOSE it were possible, by the promise of a reward, say of a sum of money, to induce some persons, who never enter a place of worship, to attend as often as the Church is opened, or to induce some who only come now and then, when it suits them, to be regular in their attendance ; what would you think of the disposition manifested by those who were thus wrought upon ? Would you think it piety ? Would you consider it devotion towards God ? Would it be any sense of the duty of joining in the public worship of God ? Would it be any apprehension of the benefits, moral and religious, to be derived from the services of the sanctuary ? Would it be any feeling of pleasure or satisfaction from such services ? Why, of course, you would not think it any of these. You would see in such attendance nothing that could on moral or religious grounds, be approved. You would look to the motive. You would call the promised reward a bribe. And you would see in the habitual attendance on religious ordinances, so procured, not the manifestation of the love of God, but only the manifestation of the love of money.

And so also, we should judge, if the supposed case concerned not the exercises of piety, but the doings of charity. If, under an impulse of a similar kind to that we have

supposed, we could secure so many of these doings—so much time to be given to the care of the poor—so much to the nursing of the sick—so much to the bettering the condition of the humbler classes of society, in any way, sanitary or social, intellectual or spiritual, moral or religious—or if we were able to ensure to the donor of a sum of money towards the promotion of such objects, that such sum of money should, in the regular order of Providence, return to him with tenfold interest, what would you call such doings or such donations? Would not you, looking to the motive, and seeing not holy charity, but only the sordid love of gain, pronounce with unhesitating decision, that in this case, there was as little of the love of man as there was in the other of the love of God? Under the semblance of religion in the one, and of charity in the other, you would equally detect the reigning principle in the soul, and that regard neither to God nor man, but only to what our Saviour calls, the mammon of unrighteousness.

And it would not at all alter the case if, instead of supposing application made to the principle of avarice we supposed it made to some other principle and promised gratification in any way, to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life. Behind the religious observance, behind the charitable act, or the charitable gift, we should always see the motive, the inducement, the reward, the bribe; and we would not and could not impute to piety, or to charity what had its origin in some mean and unworthy passion. The religion thus bought is no religion. It has only the outward aspect of religion. The charity thus bought is no true charity. It has only the outward aspect of charity. You cannot bribe a man to be religious. You cannot bribe a man to be charitable. Even where the bribe, be it what it may, acts most powerfully, it only demonstrates the more clearly the presence and the rule in the soul of the evil or inferior principle, to which it makes

application. In this way you may show and pander to a man's sordidness, or his pride, or his ostentation, but you can neither advance nor increase what of religion or charity is in him, nor make him religious or charitable if he is not.

There is example of such bribery to a particular course of religious and moral action, in the doctrine of the false prophet Mahomet. Do so and so, said he, and you shall be rewarded. And then, in glowing terms, suited to the imagination and the passions of Eastern nations, he described the reward, such enjoyments as man's sensual nature is capable of, but eternal in duration, and heightened inconceivably amidst the splendor and the voluptuousness of the promised paradise. He made in short such application to the sensuality of men, as I have supposed might be made to the avarice of men. And it is plain that in as far as his followers are in their exercise of religion or their works of charity, actuated by regard to such reward, they are under the dominion, not of moral or religious principle, but of the sensual passions proper to our animal nature only.

The inducement to obedience is not the same in its sensual or objectionable nature, which is held forth in the Mosaic law. Yet is it not to be denied, that the Jews under the law were dealt with on the principle of temporal rewards and temporal punishments. Comparatively little, if indeed anything, was said or intimated to them, in the law, of the future life, its rewards or punishments; though, of course, whatever apprehension of that life arises instinctively in man's nature, or comes down to him by tradition from a primitive revelation, they would have as well as other men. But to induce them to obey the law, there was given to the Jews the promise of temporal prosperity. And there was the terror of a temporal infliction to prevent their disobedience. It is plain that such motives had, and were intended to have, weight. Why else should they have been suggested, and dwelt on with

such impressive energy and amplitude in the law? But it is just as plain, that in as far as they were needed and had actual weight, the character of Jewish obedience was thereby lowered, being less the result of religious principle, and more that of sordid and selfish calculation. The truth is, that under the law, the Jews were, and were treated as children. This the Apostle expressly says in the Epistle to the Galatians. They were in a state of pupilage. They were not supposed to be capable of understanding or appreciating the highest motives to heavenly virtue. When you desire, for good ends, to make a child pursue a certain proper and desirable course of conduct, you do not expect that he is to be so led by the highest sentiments of morals or religion. These he is quite incapable of understanding or appreciating. And you have to act on his mind, and guide his conduct, and form his habits, by the, to him, more intelligible and stronger inducements of immediate reward or immediate punishment. These answer your immediate purpose, and you keep to them, till in progress of time, he is capable of feeling and being acted upon by higher and nobler motives; never, however, ascribing to conduct so produced, the character, in your estimation, due to conduct proceeding from the higher principles of religion and virtue. Just so it was with the Jews in their early history. Morally and religiously they were as children, and God dealt with them as such, putting them under a system suited to their moral condition, which required the pressure and strength of immediate and directly felt reward and punishment, that they might be influenced to the course of conduct laid down in the law. In the progress of their history, they rose to a state of higher and more correct moral apprehension, the traces and evidence of which are to be found in the Psalms and in the writings of the Prophets; and higher in proportion was the virtue of their saints. Yet it is plain, were it but from the fact alone of the unrepealed ordination under the law, by which obedience was connected with

temporal prosperity, and the reverse, the Jewish never reached the high standard of the Christian morality ; and when Christ came, it was not only by his own obedience to satisfy the demands of the law, and so to magnify it and make it honourable, but also in his doctrine and by his example, in the motives which he urged, and in the motives by which Himself was actuated, to illustrate the law, showing what the obedience it requires, and whence such obedience must proceed ; and so He raised incalculably in motive, in extent and purity, the standard of human duty.

And why was not this done sooner, the objection rises ? Why were not such higher and juster views given in the early as well as in the more advanced periods, of the Jewish history ? That is really to ask : Why is not the whole order of the Divine Providence different from what it is ? That is a question with which man is manifestly incompetent to deal. It involves interests too great for him to comprehend. It embraces too great a sweep for his eye to take in. It is not for the children of a day to compute or settle what was most suitable in the eternity that is past, or what will prove most suitable in the eternity that is to come. But, assuming that order to be established, because the most accordant with an all perfect reason, and best fitted to carry out the designs and purposes of infinite goodness, we see in the gradual advance of the Jewish people from a state of pupilage, in which to use the Apostle's words, "they were in bondage under the elements of the world," to the light and freedom of the Gospel dispensation, a perfect conformity with the ordinary method of the Divine working. The plant springs not up in a moment to the full perfection of its beauty. The fruit comes not forth in an hour ready or ripe to be plucked. The oak becomes not in a day fit to be converted into the noble vessel, which shall bravely stand the buffeting of winds and waves. Man springs not into being in the full exercise of his powers either of body or

mind. There is progress in the discoveries of science and in the march of civilization. There are tokens of progress going on through ages—to us innumerable, though they be but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night, to Him, with whom one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day,—in the preparation of this great globe itself, for the accommodation and use of its present inhabitants. And God does only follow the same order, his own order, appearing in all his works, and in all his providential government of the world, in the moral and religious progress discernible in the world, discernible in the Jewish Church—which, though heir of the promises, was yet in a state of childhood and pupilage ; progress from the kind of obedience which flows from the relation of servants, subject to punishment and stimulated by wages, to the higher and better kind of obedience which flows from the affection of sons, sharing the same nature, contemplating the same ends, and rejoicing in the same things with the great Father, to whom it is rendered ; progress such as Paul describes in these memorable words : “ Now, I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all ; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed by the Father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world ; but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons ; and because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba Father.”

But the question rises does the Gospel, does the new dispensation, does its great Author originate and enjoin this higher, purer, nobler virtue, the virtue of obedience, flowing from the affection of sons, rather than from the hopes and fears of slaves ? Does not the New Testament speak of reward ? Does it not, in glowing terms, speak of

the glory and honour which have all the Saints? Did not Christ himself speak of reward? Is not the doctrine of reward contained in the text? Is not a promised reward urged in it to acts of charity and virtue? How else then can we understand such a passage as that before us: "He that receiveth a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink to one of these little ones a cup of cold water, in the name of a disciple, shall in no wise lose his reward."

Indeed, the doctrine of reward is here taught. It would be absurd to deny it, and absurd to attempt, as some do, to slur it over, and if possible get rid of it, as if it were not consistent with the general doctrine of the Gospel; as if it were not taught by Christ himself; as if it were not obviously intended by Him, to tell and to tell directly and powerfully, on the hearts and lives of His disciples. We heartily receive the doctrine, and acknowledge its authority. And how then, it next occurs to be asked, how do you acquit the Gospel of making application to that same sordid principle, which vitiates all exercises of religion, or acts of charity, as being purchased and paid for, instead of flowing from right and pure principle? We do so, not by denying that under the Gospel there is reward—not by denying the excellent nature of the reward—not by denying that the hope of it should be cherished—not by denying that if cherished, it must tell, and tell powerfully, on the motives and principles of action—but by setting forth what the nature of the promised reward is.

That reward is set forth, doubtless, especially in the apocalyptic vision, under material images, and by allusions drawn from earthly and material things. There are crowns of gold spoken of, and white robes, and palms of triumph. There is a heavenly city to dwell in, resplendent with all conceivable magnificence. There is a heavenly sanctuary in which to worship. There is the fruit of the tree of life

of which to eat. There is the water of the river of life of which to drink. But these images—and others such—are not intended to be understood in the letter, nor are they by the least instructed in the Gospel doctrine so understood, or once conceived of as capable to minister to any selfish principle or sensual passion. Whatever be the glory of the visible Heaven, whatever the harmonies of its exalted worship, or the honour of angelic intercourse and society, the essence of the heavenly happiness, as described in the Gospel, is known and felt to be in its holiness—knowing God—loving God—and loving those who are his children—being like Him. What then if the heavenly reward, the reward which Christ promised, the reward which the Gospel holds out, be merely the increase of such sources of happiness—more knowledge of God, more love to God, more love to the children and the creatures of God!

Dost thou delight now in the knowledge of God? Dost thou find an exalted satisfaction in the contemplation of his character, and in learning more of his wondrous ways, and of his perfect excellence? Hast thou pleasure in tracing the Creator's power and wisdom in his works? Hast thou pleasure in studying the wise and gracious order of his Providence? Above all dost thou desire to look into the wonders of redeeming love, and with all saints, to comprehend more and more the height, and depth, and length and breadth of that love of God which passeth knowledge? Dost thou seek to know, and delight to know, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ? Then, in that world above, and as the reward of thy search after such knowledge, and thy delight in such knowledge now, thou shalt have thy capacities for acquiring such knowledge, and thy opportunities for acquiring such knowledge, immeasurably increased, so that it may be said of thee, that "in God's light, thou shalt see light, and thou shalt know even as thou art known." Dost thou now love God, and find thy delight and duty and happiness

in loving God? Then shall thy capacity of loving God be increased. Dost thou find happiness now in the love of thy neighbour, and in all those acts of courtesy and kindness and self-denying charity, by which thou canst advance thy neighbour's happiness, and improve his condition? Then, as the reward of such benevolence, thou shalt have given thee still greater largeness of heart, more of that divine principle by which thou art actuated. Thou shalt be made more loving and more Christlike. The reward of the Christian, in short, proceeds on that great principle so often laid down by our Lord: "He that hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance." The promise of the Gospel is: Serve God here, and thou shalt be enabled to serve him more and better hereafter. Thou shalt become a being capable of higher and nobler virtue. Thou shalt draw nearer to the throne of the Eternal. Thou shalt approach more in thy nature unto His, who is love, and dwells in love. Thou shalt be able to offer unto God a purer and more intelligent homage. The aspirations of thy soul after a closer communion with God shall be satisfied. And thy heart shall be enlarged in holy love to all his creatures.

But this reward, can it once be said or supposed, that any taint of sordidness attaches to it? Why the reward is simply, to him who has true piety, more of it; to him who has true virtue, more of that true virtue; to him who has Christian love, more of that Christian love. It does not contemplate anything more desirable than piety and virtue, by the offer of which to win to piety and virtue. But, assuming in the soul the existence of these—love to God and love to man—and the reign of these, and the full enjoyment of the soul in these, it promises to extend and confirm and deepen them. Give me more, more of that on which my heart is set, and in which my happiness lies, that is the cry of every soul. Give me wealth, more wealth—pleasure, more pleasure—power, more power—say the various classes of the worldly minded. Give me

more conformity to the will and image of God, says the Christian—more of a Christlike temper and disposition towards all men. Is not that a religious desire? And if the reward of exercising piety and works of charity is to have such desire gratified, then is not the desire of such reward a virtuous desire? Far from having any taint of sordidness attaching to it, is it not in reality the purest and holiest desire which a human soul can form? And is it not a noble view which is thus given of what Christianity proposes to make of man? It does not seek to win him to high conduct by application to mean principles. But it inspires high principles into the soul, and then as the reward of acting out these principles, it proposes the very growth of these divine principles themselves. And under its influence, the soul perceives such growth to be the noblest reward that could be offered, and the greatest proof and token of the love of God who offers it.

The most illustrious instance of obedience to God and love to man, is that given by Him, who came from heaven to save us. In his case, as in the case of his followers, there was a reward prepared, the prospect of which was fitted to strengthen and stimulate that nature in Christ, which alone was capable of being strengthened or stimulated, and which was ultimately bestowed, and is now being enjoyed. "For the joy that was set before him," says St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame." What then was the nature of this joy? We have already said, that Christianity does not make application to any mean, low or unworthy passions in man, to win him to the conduct it enjoins. It inspires high principles, such as naturally lead to that conduct. But application not only was not, but could not be made, in the case of Christ Himself, to any mean or unworthy principle. For none such existed in that nature which was holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners. Application could only be made to principles high and holy and excellent, the

love to God and to his creatures, which were the governing principles in Him. The reward of Christ was the apprehension of the glory to God, and the blessed consequences to men, which would follow from his work of redemption. It was the joy of seeing the Church redeemed, the joy of benevolence, infinite and tender benevolence, perceiving the results of its own work. And who does not see in the very fact that such a reward as this was felt to strengthen and stimulate, the clearest proof of the most exalted virtue? And so it is with his disciples. Before them too, a joy is set, the joy of knowing God more perfectly—and of loving Him more devotedly. If God has been pleased to connect the works of faith and labor of love, which Christians are here called to perform, with the degree in which such joy shall be experienced, is it not plain, that then they manifest the purest and most exalted principle, when animated to the discharge of duty by the hope of rising through God's infinite goodness, in the scale of being, standing nearer to the Eternal Throne, obtaining clearer views of the wondrous ways of the Unsearchable One, who sitteth thereon, and being able, through eternity, to offer Him the tribute of a nobler service and a loftier adoration?

I need not say, that such reward, any reward, is all of grace. It is not a wage merited by the work and which we are entitled to claim. It is the grace of God which implants in the soul of the believer the divine principle of love. And it is a constitution of divine grace by which God connects the actings of such principle with higher degrees of it, and greater scope and opportunity for the exercise of it. But while it is a constitution of grace, it is a divine constitution, and God is to be devoutly thanked for it, and his unspeakable goodness is to be seen in it, and believers are to recognize it, and to be cheered and encouraged by the recognition of it, and to be taught by it, how to be ever making advancement towards the perfection of which our nature is capable. For this reward is not all future; not all,

I mean, to be bestowed in the future life. It is begun now. It proceeds on a principle which obtains now in the administration of grace. Every acting of love to God strengthens the principle of piety. Every acting of love to man strengthens the principle of charity. Carry out thy feelings of piety or charity into such actions, as God gives thee the opportunity of, and these feelings shall be deepened and strengthened within thee. Be careless about so doing, and they will become weak and die away within thee. Religion is in the heart doubtless, or it exists not at all. And so is charity, if we may count it separate from religion. But neither of them will stay always in the heart, inactive, bearing no fruit, leading to no exertion. They would die if they did so. They must be carried out in action. Whoso, says St. John, keepeth God's word—actively obeys his commandments—in him is the love of God perfected; in him is that divine principle fully developed. Act thou—if thou art a believer, and God hath put the love of himself, and the love of thy brother, and the love of all men in thine heart—act as thou hast opportunity on principles so exalted, in the hope, and with the assurance that in so doing, thou shalt be rewarded by advancement in the depth of thy piety, and in the warmth and largeness of thy charity. Thou shall be made Christlike here. Thou shall be made yet more Christlike in the world that is to come. Can any Christian soul contemplate or desire a higher, better, nobler reward?

VII.

THE WEIGHTIER MATTERS OF THE LAW.

ST. MATTHEW XXIII, 23.

Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ; for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith : these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

THE law given by God to the Jewish people contained a great variety of commandments, having respect to a great variety of matters. These commandments, although all enjoined by God, were not in their nature the same. Distinctions could be made among them, fairly and justly made, both in regard of their place in a moral system, and in regard of their obligation upon moral beings. Such distinction was, we find, made at a very early period of the Jewish history, by Samuel, the Prophet, when he said : "Behold to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Such distinction we find authoritatively made in the prophecies of Hosea, wherein Jehovah himself is represented as saying, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice"—mercy, that is in preference to sacrifice,—for sacrifice, when not placed above mercy, or in room of mercy, was not only not unacceptable, but was expressly enjoined.

And such distinction it is, which our Lord here makes in the text. Of some virtues or duties he speaks as "the weightier matters of the law," obviously, that is, the more essential, the more important ; those that should be esteemed most, and first obeyed. And others, he teaches us, by necessary implication to consider lighter and of less moment. He makes in that, the same distinction among duties, which our catechism, therein proceeding on sound and scriptural principles, makes so clearly among sins.

"Some sins," it says, "in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others." So He says in effect: "Some duties, in themselves, and by reason of their very nature, are more important and ought to be regarded as of more importance than others."

Such distinction among duties men have never been in anywise slow to make. I do not say, or mean, the very distinctions which our Lord made; but distinctions, so far like his, that they regard the importance and obligation of different duties or classes of duties, and place some above others. On the contrary, there has always been a strong disposition on the part of mankind to make such distinctions. And the tokens of this disposition are to be found, both in the systems of duty which are laid down by moral and religious teachers, and in the practical conduct of life pursued by individual persons. There is, as we have seen, ample authority for making distinctions of this nature. But the nature of the distinction which is actually made goes far to determine the character of the moral system in which it is made, and the moral character of the individual by whom it is made.

Take it in respect of the former of these,—a moral and religious teacher, or a moral and religious system. Suppose the one to teach—suppose to be set forth in the other—the distinction, not which our Lord makes in the text, but the distinction which it is plain from the text the Scribes and Pharisees made practically, that payment of the tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, was more important and more binding than 'judgment, mercy and faith'; than justice and charity, that is, in respect of men, and piety towards God; would anything be wanting to show the utter incongruity of such teaching with any sound or just notions of the relation in which men stand to God and to one another. The disproportioned place given to such a duty, supposing it to be a duty, would clearly indicate incorrect notions of all duty. This is an extreme case. It is

supposing a very gross and palpable error in the distinction made, and it is supposing the error to be plainly and directly and of set purpose taught. And yet in the moral and religious teaching of Christian writers, and of those, too, whom it is usual for some to speak of, with peculiar reverence, as the Fathers, there are distinctions plainly made and, doubtless, almost as wrong in principle, and more mischievous in their effects. For example, the disposition, in the ancient Church,—observe, I say, the ancient Church, not the primitive Church—to give an utterly disproportioned importance to mere almsgiving, as if it involved all other virtues, or could stand in stead of them. From any such incorrect, one-sided views of duty, it is certain the Gospel in its direct teaching is altogether free. It has direct precepts in regard of duty, and it exhibits a perfect moral example. Both proclaim, the latter not less emphatically than the former, that “on love to God and love to man hang all the law and the prophets.” And to such representation, that sense of moral fitness and obligation in men, to which our Lord himself appealed, saying : “Wherefore judge ye not of yourselves what is right,” will, whenever fairly appealed to, give its assent and its testimony. This is one excellence of the Gospel morality. In its direct teaching, it never falls into the error of making that the great duty, which is either no duty at all or only one form, and perhaps by no means the most important form, in which some good principle should manifest itself. Always in it, by its great Author, and by all his Apostles, “judgment, mercy and faith” are represented as the “weightier matters of the law.”

But moral and religious teachers may be chargeable with giving false views of morals, and with making wrong distinctions in regard of different duties, as effectually and as mischievously, as in the case supposed, who yet do not do so directly. They may do so indirectly ; they may in words plain enough, positive enough, direct enough, lay down right views of duty, and pro-

claim such and such duties to be the more important ; insomuch, that were you to charge them with inculcating error on such points, they could triumphantly point you to such and such statements, plainly the opposite of what you insinuate, and precisely what you would desire to have taught. And yet the effect of their whole teaching may be to counteract these statements, and to produce what you condemn. For certain duties or supposed duties might be so much dwelt on ; there might be manifested such an evident predilection for them ; there might be such pains taken to enforce them ; they might be so frequently brought forward, and illustrated, and explained, and defended, and enjoined, that the effect would infallibly be produced, of making them be supposed the weightier matters of the law, and others of less moment, and less deserving to be regarded. And if such were either no duties at all, or duties comparatively trivial and unimportant—comparatively, I say, for no duty, however we may call or think it small, and however we may justly esteem it smaller than others, is to be regarded as trivial and unimportant—then would the teachers or systems, so dwelling on them and enforcing them, be as really chargeable with the guilt of giving forth erroneous views of duty, as if they did so in set terms. They do it in effect, and those that are guided by them are led to entertain and to act upon wrong views of “the law,” and of what are “the weightier matters of the law.”

For example, there are certain pure, right and holy affections which should exist in men’s hearts, towards God and man, and in the manifestation of which in various forms, according as circumstances arise and occasions call for, consists the practical duty of life. And there are also certain external means and ordinances appointed to strengthen and stimulate them, and give them, from time to time, fresh impulse and power over the whole man—say with us, the sanctifying of the first day of the week ; the institution of the Christian ministry and of public wor-

ship, and the observance of the sacraments; should any one so dwell on these, the means, as that they were forgotten to be, and ceased to appear *means*, and came to be considered in themselves *ends*, and to supersede in the mind those very ends which they were designed to promote—in the apprehension of the mind to equal or to surpass them in value, being regarded not as duties to aid to the performance of other and higher duties, but as the highest and the most important duties themselves—then practically, however, it be occasionally disavowed, there is given as false a view of moral duty as if it were done in direct terms; and in effect men are led utterly wrong and astray as to what are the “weightier matters of the law.” There are other examples of a similar nature which might be given. There are moral systems, for example, in which little is said of any duty the creature owes to the Creator; so little—though that little may be sound enough, and true enough—that the impression is left, that the common duties of man to man are all that are of any consequence to be regarded or practised. And there are religious works, in which the duty of stimulating and scrutinizing the affections towards God is so exclusively dwelt on, that there seems to be no place left for, and no importance attached to, the common business and the common duties in which so large a portion of every day of the life of every man must of necessity be passed. Each of these makes in effect, and leads others in opinion and in practice, to make distinctions between classes of duties, attaching an importance to one class, which, if it does not deny, it fails to give to the other, which are not warranted by anything in the nature of these duties, or in the representation given of them in the Gospel. Now from any such tendency indirectly, as much as directly, the Gospel is altogether free. It does not place rites in the room of principles. It does not so dwell on or enforce those which it enjoins, as to make them seem of highest consequence. One page of the New Testament would contain all that is said of all

the external rites which it is binding on a Christian to observe. And all the rest of it is taken up with inculcating holy principles and holy affections, and holy principles and affections to be carried out in a holy practice. No man will be a ritualist, contented with, or taken up with mere external observances, who submits himself to its teaching. The whole tenor and tendency of the teaching of Christ and his Apostles is opposed to such a disposition, tending to make all those who receive it, and ponder on it, and place themselves under its influence, to know and believe that "the Kingdom of God is not meat or drink or any outward thing, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Neither does the Gospel in its moral teaching so dwell on one class of duties, that growing out of our relation to God, or that growing out of the different relations in which we stand to our brethren, as to displace either from the regard of those who receive it, or to make one weighty matter of the law exclude another as weighty, any more than it would make "tithe of mint and anise and cummin" stand in stead of "judgment, mercy and faith." The Gospel teaches all, and teaches all in due place and proportion. Can any one follow Christ's teaching or example, without a due regard to God; the teaching and example of him who said, "my meat is to do the will of Him that sent me and to finish his work." Can any one follow Christ's example or teaching without a due regard to the duties we owe to one another, the example and teaching of Him, "who went about continually doing good?"

It is in this its indirect tendency, as much or more than in its direct teaching, that the Gospel morality surpasses that of the Mosaic Law. In the Law, as in the Gospel, it was said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself." But it will not be said, that amidst the multiplied provisions of the law, and the vast variety of ritual observances which it enjoined, these two

great commandments hold the same prominent place in the one as in the other: or were so set forth as to gain the same place in the minds and hearts of men. It is not only in the greater distinctness and prominence which are given to these in the Gospel, but in the constant inculcation of them and of truths and considerations which lead to them, instead of the ritual observances of the law, that the superiority is to be seen of the Christian over the Jewish dispensation. In asserting this superiority, no objection is made to the Jewish dispensation, the amount of truth revealed under it, or the manner in which duty is taught, or the duties on which stress is laid, when considered in reference to the time when, the people for whom; and the purpose for which, it was intended. For them it was no doubt suitable, nay the most suitable. But it can only be considered perfect in connection with these. In itself it was imperfect. And it did only lead the way to that brighter and better revelation, which setting no store by such rites as the Jewish people had found to be in nature and number a yoke too burdensome to be borne, did in its every part and page set forth "judgment, mercy and faith" to be "the weightier matters of the law."

And while the true teaching of the Gospel of Christ and his Apostles thus transcends the teaching of a former, even a divine dispensation, it stands also remarkably distinguished from the teaching and practice of the Church after it became rapt through the mystery of iniquity, which even in the time of the Apostles had begun to work. It is not that in the teaching and daily worship of the Roman Church, Gospel views of duty are not inculcated, but that they are so overlaid with other things, either unauthorized, or unimportant, or both; it is that ceremony is regarded so much, and the attention is fixed on so many things which can but little concern the true well-being of the soul; it is because so much is said of feasts and fasts, and Church observances, and Church authority, and Church practice, and Church allegiance, that

it becomes chargeable with making the weightier matters of the law cease to appear so, or to have the place due to them in the common apprehension. And no doubt there have been, and there are Protestant Churches and Protestant teachers, who in overweening attachment to their own peculiarities of faith or worship, or outward ecclesiastical order, by the attention they give and call to these, by the length at which, they dwell on them, and the importance which they attach to them, do practically the same thing, and too often substitute in effect things inconsiderable in themselves for "the weightier matters of the law." But for neither Roman nor Protestant errors in this respect is the Gospel accountable. Nor should any teaching be regarded which follows it not in the moral distinctions which it makes, and in the superiority which it invariably attributes to "judgment, mercy and faith," comprising, as they do, the sum of "these two great commandments, on which hang all the law and the prophets."

But the moral character of individuals may also be determined very much by the distinctions which they are in the habit of making among duties. There are two great classes of duties, those which are strictly moral in their nature, and growing necessarily out of the relation in which man stands to God, and out of the relation in which God has placed men towards one another; and those that are positive—of express and special appointment. The former cannot in any circumstances be conceived of as ceasing to be binding. The latter may be altered or repealed. The love of God, or duty to a parent, are of the former class; the institution of sacrifice, and all such rites are of the latter class. It is characteristic of hypocrisy, either that gross form of it which seeks to impose on others, or that subtler and more dangerous form of it, in which a man seeks to impose on himself, to prefer the latter to the former; to set a greater value on the positive than on the moral in religion; to be taken up with the outward observances of religion, and

regardless of its spirit and essence. The conduct of the Scribes and Pharisees whom our Lord had addressed with such severe reprobation, in the chapter before us, is a case in point. They paid tithe of mint and anise and cummin; that is they professed to be so zealous in their obedience to the law for the support of the priesthood and of public worship, that they would not fail in a matter so trifling that many doubted whether it were of obligation at all, and all knew it was of no consequence for the end proposed by the institution of tithe, whether it were so considered or not. And yet, while so scrupulous, either affectedly or really, about a matter of that sort, they disregarded the obligation of justice and mercy and faith. They distinguished in the very opposite way from that divine distinction made in the prophecies: "I will have mercy and not sacrifice:" Their distinction was: "We will have sacrifice, and not mercy." And He who knew what was in man denounces their hypocrisy. They were desirous by a show of scrupulous obedience to a law for the maintenance of religion, to be regarded as religious, perhaps to regard themselves as religious, while doing what the law of God and their own consciences condemned; and in all time, and under any and every form of religion, either in or out of the Christian Church, there have been men like them. What is the attendance of some upon the public ordinances of religion, the weekly worship on the Lord's day, or the more solemn service of the Communion, in principle and in effect, but the paying tithe of mint, anise and cummin, while omitting the weightier matters of the law. If these or similar duties, are put in the place of common honesty, or supposed to atone or to make up for the want of it, or for the want of holy charity, or of real inward piety towards God, it is by wicked hypocrites, partly seeking to impose on others, and partly on themselves, but who can never hope to impose on Him who searcheth the heart. All those positive duties, with the observance of which hypocrites would satisfy themselves if they could for neglecting moral duties, were

appointed more or less directly, with a view to enforce and render more sure and more easy the performance of those very moral duties; and to make regard to them take the place of the other, is to convert what was intended by God for good into positive evil. And whoever, conscious to himself of fraud, or falsehood, or license of any kind, thinks to make up for it by saying: I will go more regularly to Church, or I will give more to a Bible or missionary society, or I will be stricter in this or in that observance—outward religious observance—should hear as addressed to himself, what our Lord with such solemn emphasis addressed to those who shewed a like spirit of old: “Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith.”

Even among these weightier matters of the law some would fain make distinctions; and their nature, their character, their besetting sin, their ruling propensity may be seen by the distinctions they make. One man is strictly honest. He would not wrong his neighbor a penny. He would pay to the last farthing, and he would submit to any degree of toil or of self-denial, to be able to pay whatever was justly due. He does not omit “judgment.” But he is selfish, he is hard-hearted, he is indifferent to the claims of others, he is indifferent to the claims of distress, he has none of the tenderness of Christ, he has no bowels of compassion. And to suit his case, he distinguishes among those which Christ calls the weightier matters of the law, and he says: Ah! honesty is the main thing, mercy is but ornamental; I hold by the main point; at least I am honest, and that is enough for me, that will stand me in stead. And another, according to the constitution of his nature, takes a different course. He is sensitive to the claim of suffering and misery. He is benevolent and kindly disposed. But he is unscrupulous about justice and honesty and fair dealing. And so he places his main dependence on charity,

and hopes it will bear him out for omitting judgment. Are there not such men amongst us, not saying these things in words, but who manifestly do and must say such things to themselves, who manifestly do and must think such things in their hearts ; honest men, without charity, given over to a hard, cold, engrossing selfishness ; and charitable men, without honesty, ready to defraud and take advantage. What are the latter class but knaves with all their charity, or what are the former but self pleasers and self worshippers with all their honesty. Neither the one nor the other is else than an abominable hypocrite, when he makes profession of Christianity, profession of discipleship to him who reckoned judgment and mercy alike among the "weightier matters of the law." Then again some are honest, and kindly disposed too, after a sort, but they are without faith. Faith has respect to the invisible, the unseen God, in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways ; to the unseen Saviour, who gave himself for us, and who has passed into the heavens, our great High Priest and advocate with God ; and to the unseen world, into which we must all soon be removed. Faith implies right feeling, and right action in regard of all of these ; regard, love, obedience to God ; unfaltering trust in the Great Mediator between Him and us, and greater preparation for the world that is to come. Some, distinguishing among the weightier matters of the law, are fain to imagine that their honesty or their charity, or such combination as they can shew of the two, will do, without this active and influential faith in the invisible. What are such, with all the virtues to which they can lay claim, but those whom the Scriptures denounce as ungodly "living without God in the world ;" and who must be condemned hereafter, as having lived without regard to the highest and most sacred duties of the creature. Not now seeking to find, what yet might easily be found, defects in the character of any virtue, which stands isolated from others as important as itself, it may be said to such as place their dependence on virtues which stand apart

from others, as Christ said to the Scribes and Pharisees : " These ought ye to have done and not to leave the others undone." All are important, all are necessary. One will not do without the rest. No one must be omitted. True, right, honest, religious Christian principle must and will have respect unto them all.

And observe, it is not of these weightier matters of the law, that Christ said : " These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the others undone." It was in regard of what were, and of what by implication, He pronounced lighter and more trivial matters, the tithe of mint and anise and cummin. Whatever might be the strict rule of the law in regard of these, if they thought such payment binding, on them, it was binding. Even while distinguishing among duties, our Lord does not relax the obligation of any duty. Some duties must give place to others. When two come in competition one must give way. And the weightier matters of the law must carry it over those that are less important. Mercy rather than sacrifice, said He who appointed sacrifice. But the obligation of all, great and small, must be acknowledged, practically acknowledged. Our Lord gives no countenance to the omission of what might be considered comparatively small duties, or the commission of small sins. " These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the others undone." " He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much : and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much." " Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven."

While it is right, according to Scripture, and according to reason, that some duties should stand above others, as in their own nature superior, there is a special importance, because of their relation to those higher duties, which attaches to others of a different character. Thus it is with the ordinances of religion. If these are appointed, not to stand in place of the weightier matters of the

law, that is the perversion of them, but to lead to and to ensure more effectually the performance of these, then disregard of these ordinances becomes disregard of all that is most sacred and binding in moral duty—our duty to God and to our neighbor. And thus too it is, with regard to what men will be inclined to count small and slight, perhaps doubtful, deviations from duty if they be so at all. The neglect of small duties, the commission of small sins, or what are thought such, tends ultimately to the neglect of great duties, and the commission of great sins. We may not hope, while yielding to small temptations, that we shall always be able to overcome great ones. It is not only right but prudent, not only duty but safety, to begin the battle of conscience and of religious principle in small things. For only by doing so will strength be gained to overcome in greater things. It is hypocrisy to strain out a gnat and swallow a camel. But it is true wisdom and imperative duty, to scruple at the smallest fault, when, according to all experience, its commission prepares for the commission of more and greater faults.

VIII. THE TWO GREAT COMMANDMENTS.

ST. MATTHEW XXII. 35-40.

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question tempting him, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? And he said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

SUPPOSE a man, very anxious to obtain a comfortable and respectable position in the world, the ease and affluence of a well appointed household, and the means of gratifying his own tastes and those of his family, and as the result of such desire, engaging in daily and laborious exertion; you might see nothing to blame and much to approve in such a desire, and in the exertion and industry to which it gives rise. But you would hardly think of counting the man who feels it and acts on it, to be therefore a religious man. Nay, I think you would hardly do so, were you aware that he prayed to God every day in the week, and every hour in the day, to give success to his labours, and to place him in that worldly position in which his happiness would best be promoted. You would see alike in his exertions and his prayers, only the exercise of that self-love, which is not peculiar to the religious man, but is common to all men.

And suppose the exercise of this principle combined with faith in a future life, and a man were to be anxious, as for a comfortable provision for this life, so also, for a happy condition in the next life, and willing as for the former, so also for the latter, to put forth exertion and offer prayer, and submit to sacrifice and self denial, would the case be in any material respect altered, in its moral or religious character? What would there be to approve in

the man but prudent regard to his own happiness? And surely prudence—however much to be approved—is not piety, and does not necessarily imply regard either to God or man. Prudence has respect to self and self-interest. Now, though self-love is not to be run down or condemned, as if it were not a principle implanted by God and needful for our preservation in the world, as if it were a principle only given to be battled with, and mortified and expelled, yet it is not the religious principle, nor are its actings religion. Self-love is not, as we have already said, the characteristic of the religious man, but is common to all men. And though it would sound more godly and religious like, to hear a man praying to be admitted into the joys of Heaven, it need not really be more so than if he were praying for a comfortable house and an ample income.

It may serve to illustrate what I mean, and answer my purpose to suggest the same case in another form. Suppose a man to feel in himself a strong inclination to commit certain crimes, say the robbery or the murder of his neighbour; if he were deterred from yielding to this inclination, simply by a regard to the certainty or the probability of the legal punishment, would you be therefore disposed to count or call him religious? You would see in him only an exercise of prudence—to be approved of course—but no exercise of either moral or religious principle, to entitle him to the character of a good man. Or, suppose a man having given way to such evil inclinations, and committed the crimes to which they lead, and brought himself thereby under the ban of human law, and liable either to perpetual imprisonment or ignominious death; suppose him, in such circumstances, told of a means by which he might escape the condemnation he has deserved and be set on fair ground again, as respects the laws of human society, and he takes advantage of those means; would you see in his taking such advantage

anything more than a prudent regard to self, no wise to be blamed, on the contrary, very natural and very commendable, but never surely to be confounded with the exercise of moral and religious principle. Well, would the case be altered—altered that is in the principle of it—if the punishment which a man fears, and so fears that he is deterred from the commission of the crime which subjects to it, be a punishment, not in this life, but in the next; or if the way of escape which he takes advantage of, be a way of escape, not from the punishment of man here, but from the punishment of God hereafter? In either case, he is moved by fear—fear of misery to himself; and while the fear is reasonable and leads to a course that must be pronounced wise, it is not surely to be confounded with the exercise of moral or religious principle. There is not, that is there is not of necessity, any more of such principle in a man's praying to be delivered from the pains of hell, than in his praying to be delivered from the penitentiary or the gallows. It does not require a man to be under the dominion of either moral or religious principle, to fear pain and wish to be free from it here and hereafter. That, like the desire of happiness, is common to all men, good and bad, religious and irreligious alike. A man might be at heart a rebel against both human law and divine law, and yet submit through fear.

Observe that such desire of happiness and fear of pain in the future life are every way just and reasonable. And though not in themselves religion or religious, yet they are thus far connected with religion, that they imply faith in certain truths of religion; and the power of God to give what is desired, and to deliver from what is dreaded, is also acknowledged in the prayers which such desire and fear prompt. But it is not the believing in a state of weal or woe hereafter, or in the divine power to place in the one or the other, which makes a man religious. A man may believe in both, yea and in

desire for heaven and fear of hell, be moved to pray to God, and yet there may be in him nothing of what God requires in his moral creatures, but only the working of that self-love which is common to every human being, the same self-love, and nothing more, which makes the punishments of human law be dreaded, and escape from them desired.

Against such self-love—the desire of happiness—the fear of pain and misery which spring from it—nothing is to be said when they are not confounded with what is of different and higher nature. Self-love is essential to our nature as God has constituted it. The Bible always assumes the existence of it and addresses itself to it. You wish to be happy. I will tell you how you may become so. You wish to escape condemnation and misery. I will tell you how you may do so. So the Bible, which is suited to all, speaks to all, making application to a principle which is common to all. If a man has faith in the Bible, nothing surely can be more wise or reasonable than to listen to what it says. No folly can be greater than to turn a deaf ear to what it says. How shall I attain the happiness of heaven? How shall I escape the misery of hell? These, to a man who believes in a future state of happiness or misery, are surely reasonable questions for him to ask—reasonable in the same way, though to an extent inconceivably greater, as it is reasonable to ask, how he may enjoy this or that happiness, or escape this or that misery, here on earth. The happiness of heaven is unspeakably desirable. Should not then everyone desire it? The misery of hell is unspeakably to be dreaded. Should not then everyone dread it and seek to escape it? If there be a heaven and a hell, and a man thinks there is, and has it in his mind as a subject of consideration that there is; he can scarcely fail to have such desire and such fear. But are such desire and fear in themselves religion? I say, No. They are neither more nor less than the actings

of self-love. And the love of self is not religion. No! Religion is the love of God and the love of man, the love of God with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind, and the love of our neighbour as ourselves. On these two, said the great Teacher, hang all the law and the prophets.

The desire of happiness and the fear of misery hereafter, even when most truly and deeply felt, do not always prove the means of leading to this religion—to this, which alone deserves the name of religion, binding the souls of men to God, and binding men in the bands of brotherhood to one another. Sometimes, it is quite the reverse. When a man says—whether at the bidding of a corrupt church, or under the prompting of a corrupt heart, to which a corrupt church panders: I will say so many prayers; I will submit to so much penance; I will go through such a round of ceremonies; I will give so much of my substance to the church; and so I shall escape hell and reach heaven, instead of getting there by either love to God or love to man; these are often the very things he wishes to escape, as much as hell itself. He does these things, for which he accounts himself and is accounted of others religious, simply that he may be comfortable without that love to God or man in which alone religion consists. Obviously there is no love to either God or man in bargaining for escape from future misery, and for the enjoyment of future happiness, on as reasonable terms as can be obtained. And to an attempted bargain of this sort, a Protestant and Evangelical cast may be given as well as a Popish. The evil heart everywhere tries to form a religion different from God's religion, which shall yet meet the demands of self love, gaining future happiness for the soul, and enabling it to escape future misery. There is faith in certain doctrinal articles, observance of certain outward ordinances, zeal for certain church organizations, perhaps occasional excitement of devotional feeling. And these it is supposed

will do for a man's wellbeing in eternity, while there is really neither love to God nor man in the one case more than in the other. It is only a matter of self-love. I want to escape hell. I want when I die to go to heaven. And I will do thus much for these ends. There is no more religion in this, than there is in a bargain to obtain some desirable piece of property, or to get rid of some nuisance and annoyance. It is, as I have just said, self-love—not love either to God or man.

And yet it were to be wished that we saw oftener this self-love having respect to the future life; for assured faith in that life is a great thing, though it is not religion; and earnest desire to secure the blessedness and escape the misery of that life is also a great thing, though it is not religion. When such faith and such desire bring a man to Christ, He being the great Teacher, the Light of the world, tells man what true religion is. And being also ascended on high to bestow gifts on men, even on the rebellious, He does also impart the true religion; and while desires that have their origin in self-love are gratified, other and nobler desires are created, and strengthened, and satisfied; and in the establishment of the principle of piety towards God, and charity to men, that salvation from sin is begun, which, when made perfect, constitutes the blessedness—the essential blessedness—of heaven.

It is to be feared, however, that neither the faith of a future life, nor the earnest desire to secure the blessedness and escape the misery of that life, is very common with us. At least the evidences of them are very small, either in those bargainings to which the corruption of the heart and misconceptions of divine truth, lead, or in the manifest reign of that supreme love to God, or that love to our neighbours as to ourselves, in which true religion consists; that for which man was made, that which Christ gives by his Spirit; and in which—the possession of it, and the exercise of it—is man's honour and happiness.

As to this latter religion—the true religion, Christ's religion—the religion on which, He said, did hang all the law and the prophets—I put it to you, whether a fellow creature, standing to us in any very close or intimate relation, would not have much and just reason to complain, if we gave him no more regard or love, no more consideration, no more community of feeling with what he desired, than is generally rendered to the great God in whom we live, and move and have our being. There is scarce a human and earthly relation, in which such regard would not be counted wanting; and what then, if supreme regard is required and reasonable? While, as respects the love of our neighbour, it is much, if selfishness refrains from overreaching and plundering, and sticks only to maxims and precepts which are more minded than are those of the Gospel, by many who are hearers of the Gospel. Let everyone mind himself. Trouble yourself about nothing, or nobody that you can help. There would be a miserable account of our religion, it may be feared, if tried by the standard of the text, either in that part which is Godward, or in that part of it which is manward. How should it be otherwise, if our very religion is often only the fruit of self-love, the salvation of the soul being all that is thought of, and that salvation, not meaning the reign of holy love in the soul, the establishment of that kingdom of God which is righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, but merely deliverance from anticipated misery, and admission into some fancied Paradise above? And as to this selfish religion—this human religion, according to which heaven becomes matter of bargain, in some form suited to Protestant and Presbyterian notions—it cannot be said there is much appearance of it either; and heaven must be conceived to be easily gained, and hell easily escaped, if heaven may be gained and hell escaped, through such measure of regard for religious ordinances as is generally shewn, or such obedience to Gospel precepts as is usually

yielded. The truth is, the sad truth, that there is, whatever of faith may be professed about a future life, little thought about it. The seen and temporal are so much the object of regard, that there is little left for the unseen and the eternal. Men are so much taken up about gain or loss in worldly things, that they have no leisure to think about their souls, or to seek after their future happiness, either in one way or another; either in God's way, or in ways of their own devising. To secure this or that worldly advantage, to escape this or that loss, is more thought of, more a matter of interest, by a thousand degrees, than the loss or gain of the soul. That is left to chance—left to a more convenient season—left to the most inconvenient of all seasons, when the body is weak, and the mind is weak, and death is near, and judgment is near, and the great leap must be taken in the dark, without just ground of hope, and only an extorted prayer or two to trust to. Now, be not satisfied, any of you, with either agreeing or disagreeing with these general statements of mine—statements which I must make general. It is not given to preachers, as it was given to the Prophet in the case of David, to go from one hearer to another, and say, in respect of the charge made: "Thou art the man." Consider not whether the statement be true of others, or of whom, if it be true, it is true. See if it be true, O man, of thyself. Listen if the Lord, the Prophet, who is also the Lord of Conscience, be not stirring up thy conscience now to speak to thee, judging, accusing and condemning thee. In this let self-love speak. Till thou hast true religion, seek it for thyself. When thou hast it, thou wilt seek that others have it too.

And this true religion—the religion which Christ enjoined, which Christ exemplified, which Christ imparts—is the religion of love, love to God and love to man. When a man is brought to Christ, either through desire of rest, as being weary and heavy laden; or through fear, consciousness of sin and the desert of sin, making even here

a beginning of hell within him, Christ gives rest and peace. But how? It is by the manifestation of God, such manifestation as creates love to God. Christ manifests God in the grace and mercy of his nature. In his own person he manifests this grace and mercy; in his teaching, in his miracles, in his sacrifice of himself, in his intercession, in his promises. So doing, it is not simply a selfish desire to which he ministers—as if he had said—You desire future happiness, and you shall have it—or you dread future misery, and you shall escape it. But he leads the soul out of and away from itself, and its own immediate interests and hopes and fears; and fixing its regard on the greatest and most attractive of all objects, he creates in it the noblest and purest of all affections—even the love of God, the love of infinite goodness and excellence. And the soul, escaping from self and thought of self, being occupied with the thought of God and the love of God as revealed by and in Christ, becomes at once happier and purer. For as self-seeking, for time or for eternity, is not religion, so neither is it nor does it lead to real happiness. But then are we all happiest, then do we taste most of true pleasure—such pleasure as is at God's right hand for evermore—yea, and of such happiness as God himself forever enjoys—when losing thought of ourselves, our hearts are going forth in love to God and man. I say to God and man—and man. It is not only in the contemplation of the devout mind and in the affections of the devout heart, that this escape from self is gained, but, also, in the feeling and exercise of benevolence to our fellow-men. And such benevolence—part of our original constitution though weakened by sin—the Gospel enjoins, extends and consecrates, by the manifestation of the love of God and of Christ. “A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another: as I have loved you, that ye love one another.” The Gospel reveals the most illustrious example of benevolence and self-sacrifice for others. And the faith of it is

ever strong to create a like temper and disposition. "Hereby," says St. John, expressing the natural consequence as a matter of feeling and duty, of a full and believing apprehension of the Gospel : " Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down his life for us ; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." There is a constraining power in the example of Christ, which no true disciple of Christ can or does fail to feel, so that it is an axiom in the Christian system that " he that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brethren, is in darkness even until now."

With the knowledge and faith of Christ such divine affection towards God and man begins to exist ; and the true Christian desire, that which is not the fruit of nature, but of grace, is that it may increase in strength and power, to control and to direct in all the life and conduct. The fear of hell is with the Christian fear of a state in which such divine affection does not exist. The desire of heaven with the Christian is the desire of a state in which this divine affection shall exist in all ; shall exist in himself unchecked and unrepressed by any meaner impulse ; shall have food whereon, as it were, to grow, in the ever brightening manifestations of the all perfect God, who is himself love and dwells in love ; and shall have full scope for its exercise amidst the pure beings that fill the courts of the heavenly sanctuary. In speaking and thinking of heaven, and hell and the soul's salvation, men often fail to think of what these really are, and attach to them ideas other than those, or at least less than those, that Scripture authorizes. Heaven, in its essence—and without noting what are its accessories—is the reign, full and undisputed in men's souls, of love to God and to his creatures. Hell is the full and unchecked reign of sin. Salvation is deliverance from sin, its punishment, and its very being, with which punishment is inextricably bound up. To desire the happiness of heaven without regard to the holiness of heaven, is no religious desire. To desire escape from hell, and not from the sin which reigns in hell, is no religious

desire ; and a man may be very earnestly seeking what he calls the salvation of his soul, and what may in one sense be properly so called, and not have one spark of religion. The young ruler, who came to Christ, had this anxiety about his salvation, without religion. A man desiring to enjoy the happiness of heaven, or to be freed from the pains of hell, may be one in whom nature alone is working ; but he in whom there is the desire of holiness—all holiness—holiness in heart and life ; he who is hungry and thirsty after righteousness, is one in whom grace is working—is one in whom God's Spirit is working. That is no true religion where such desire does not exist, strong and growing in strength from day to day.

Many have so little religion—either false or true—so little even of the aspect, pretence, or profession of either, that to speak to them of trying and testing it would be indeed a work of supererogation. Their difficulty would be to find any to try. But those who have some religion, something that bears the name and stands in the place of religion, would do well to enquire into the nature of it ; and specially whether it is only the religion of a selfish heart, desiring, as is natural and reasonable, to escape hell and have a happy heaven to dwell in for evermore, or whether it is the true religion of Christ—the religion of love to God and man—deficient only, in that such love is not perfect, according to the measure which is required, and which the heart is capable of ; but making plain and clear its true nature, and heavenly origin, and heavenly destination, by its aspirations after such perfectness ; its confessions of shortcomings, and its longings and prayers, for advancement towards so glorious a consummation. Dost thou love God : dost thou desire to love Him more : dost thou grieve over the shortcomings of thy love, and the little power thou hast to show thy love to God ? Some will venture to say they do, whose love to God might justly be questioned, on the ground of these Scripture maxims—"This is the love of God"—the proof of it—the fruit of it—the natural devel-

opment and manifestation of it, "that we keep his commandments." "He that saith, I know God, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth God's word, in him is the love of God perfected," developed—brought to its full consummation. Men can delude, and have deluded, and do delude themselves about a love to God, whom they have not seen. Well then, try your love to your neighbour whom you have seen. Dost thou mourn, as over the ungodliness, so over the remaining selfishness of thy nature, and dost thou see in every outbreking of such selfishness, the token of what, if unremoved, will make a hell for thee, even though no place of darkness were prepared for the sinner? Is this thy grief, that thou dost little for others? Art thou willing to help thy brother in his need? to have patience with him, and to be forbearing towards him? Art thou sorry thou hast not more time, more opportunity, more ability, to do good to others? Or, dost thou grudge any time; dost thou neglect every opportunity; dost thou fail to employ such power as thou hast to do good? Art thou glad to escape an opportunity of helping on thy brother? And dost thou wrap thyself up in a mantle of selfishness, through which no interest, which is not immediately thine own, can reach thy heart, awaken thy sympathies or call forth thine exertions? Then, how shall it ever be said that thou lovest thy neighbour as thyself, that thou lovest thy brother, even as Christ loved thee? "I am a man"—a heathen poet puts the sentiment into the mouth of one of the characters whom he describes—"I am a man, and nothing belonging to man, do I consider foreign to myself." How much more is it the sentiment of a believer: "I am a Christian, and nothing belonging to those for whom Christ died, can I consider without interest to me. I must work for men spiritually, temporally as I have opportunity." Heaven begins in these dispositions; nor will the gates of the City which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God, ever open to those who have them not.

IX.

THE SEPARATE FUNCTIONS OF LAW AND LOVE.

I. TIMOTHY, I. 9.

Knowing this that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient.

IT is said, that for some hundreds of years after the establishment of the Roman republic, there existed no law; against the crime of parricide. And the reason of this was, not that parricide was not accounted a crime, but, that it was accounted a crime so monstrous and unnatural that it could not possibly occur. Nothing had yet taken place, in the simple state of society which then existed, to make the legislators who drew up the twelve tables of the ancient Roman law, think of parricide at all, or at least think of it as of sufficient importance to be made the subject of an express statute, and prohibited under special penalties. Nor was it till this happy state of things was altered, and the crime in question was perpetrated, that it became necessary to lay down a law upon the subject. In this case, to use St. Paul's expression to the Galatians, speaking of the moral law, "the law was added because of transgressions." The law was established only after actual proof had been given of the possibility of the crime, and a tendency in some to the commission of it. And the establishment of the law was proof, not of a more, but of a less virtuous state of society, in that the life of parents, which had before been accounted sufficiently safe, and sufficiently protected by the general moral principle and right dispositions which prevailed throughout the community, was now to be put under the more immediate guardianship of positive law, in order to ensure its preservation. Not that then, or at any period in the history of

the Roman state, or of any other state, the safety of parents from their children depended mainly or much on such positive law. No state of society could long exist in which such was the case. But, that in so far as it depended on it at all and such law was necessary, there was plainly indicated a lower state of moral feeling, and of domestic affection, than had existed before.

Now, what took place in regard of parricide in Rome, takes place generally in regard of human laws. Laws are not usually made against crimes which have never occurred, and to which there is no observed and manifested tendency. So long as the right feelings of the community in regard of any point are sufficient to ensure right conduct, nobody thinks of legislation. It is not till this ceases to be the case, and there has been the plain manifestation of an evil tendency, likely like all evil tendencies, to spread and to be perpetuated, that the need of an express statute is felt, and the law must come in with its prohibitions and penalties. "The law," again to use the Apostle's words, "the law is added because of transgressions."

And as it is so with human law, so has it been with the divine law. Consider the history of the law, as that is given us in the Scriptures. It does not appear that any system of moral law was imposed on Adam and Eve, in the paradise in which they were placed after their creation. It is very certain that the laws of the two tables, the ten commandments, could neither have been necessary for them, nor intelligible to them. Eight of these commandments are prohibitions—prohibitions of certain things, to which they had no tendency, of which they had no knowledge, of which indeed they could form but a very imperfect idea. Of the other two, the one—the law of the Sabbath—is a positive rule, which might in some way be revealed to them, and the other—the law in regard of honour to parents—respected a state of society which had

not yet come into existence. We do not even hear that any promulgation was made to them of the law of love itself; the law that we love God, with all our heart and with all our soul, and with all our strength, and our neighbour as ourselves. There was in truth no need for any such law. God had made man upright and after his own image, and when he viewed his own work he pronounced it good. This being the case, we are sure all his impulses, all his affections, all his principles were good. What was most worthy to be loved, he would love most. What was best to be done, he would be most inclined to do. It was no more necessary to command him while in this state to love God, or to love his neighbour, by a solemnly promulgated law, than it was necessary to command him to open his eyes that he might see, or to eat and drink that his body might be nourished and sustained. In point of fact, he was subjected for the purpose of probation—such probation, as seems necessary to the condition and stability of a moral creature—to a positive rule only, the rule not to eat of the fruit of a particular tree in the garden.

It was at a subsequent period that the law of the decalogue—the moral law—was given by God; and that in the existence of a very different state of things indeed, in the nature, and character, and conduct of men. It was after abundant manifestation of the tendency in man to each and all of these sinful things, the prohibition of which was solemnly promulgated on Mount Sinai. The law—by which I mean, and it is the meaning of the Apostle in the text, when he speaks of the law as not made for a righteous man—the law, I say, by which I mean, the solemn promulgation of the Divine will, contained in the ten commandments, was added because of transgressions; was rendered necessary by the inefficacy to produce right conduct, of the moral principles originally implanted by God, in the nature of man, but which had failed, in the case of our first parents, in that trial to which they had

been subjected, and had since, in them and in their posterity, been weakened and corrupted by sinful passions and tempers and practices. Had no tendency ever existed or been manifested towards idolatry and image worship, there had been no need of the first and second commandments of the law. Had the name of God been ever properly revered, and the obligation of an oath held sacred, the third had been unnecessary. Had men from the beginning remembered the day of holy rest; or had children, in the spontaneous exercise of the affections ever looked up with due reverence and yielded a due submission to their parents, the fourth and fifth might have been dispensed with. And so with the remaining statutes of the moral law; if in malicious and revengeful passion no man had ever shed a brother's blood; if no one had ever given way to licentious indulgence, or disregarded the rights of property, or the sacredness of truth, or coveted the possession of what was rightfully another's. It was actual sin on all these points which called for and rendered necessary the promulgation of express law. Such promulgation did not render that sinful which was not so before, nor make that be regarded as sinful which was not so regarded before. It was proof in regard of all the points specially alluded to in the law of the Decalogue, that the moral principles of men were insufficient to regulate them, and there was need of a more direct and stringent rule, than was to be found in the mere unregulated impulses of the nature of man. It is the same in all legislation, human and divine. So long as the natural feelings and principles of men keep them in the desired course of conduct, express law commanding or prohibiting is unnecessary. When this ceases to be the case, then the law is made—"added, because of transgressions."

And the purpose of such law, what is it? To restore the right moral feelings and principles again after they had been lost? To restore the power of these feelings

and principles after that power had been taken away or weakened? Not at all. The law has not, cannot have, any such efficacy, is not intended to have it, is not supposed to have it. If, in a Roman of the third or fourth century of the republic, there was the heart of a parricide, and there was no power or efficacy in the pleadings of natural affection in his soul, or of moral principle, why he should not for the gratification of revenge or covetousness imbrow his hands in a parent's blood, would the simple promulgation of the authoritative law of the state, however accompanied with threatening of pains and penalties denounced against such as presumed to violate it; would that mere promulgation soften the heart of the murderer in intention, restore the supremacy of filial tenderness in his nature, and make him the willing subject of right principle? Never,—nor would any man think or expect that it would do so. The purpose was, through the medium of fear—fear of a known, recognized and formidable authority—to restrain the outward conduct, to lay hold of the hand, and turn it aside from wielding the weapon, which it had been intended to plunge in a parent's heart; not to lay hold of the affections, and convert the bitterness and the unnatural passion of a depraved mind into love and tenderness again. And such in regard of the sins to which directly and indirectly the law of the Decalogue points, is the purpose of that law, and the limitation of its efficacy. The Apostle shows the purpose of the law very plainly by the character he gives of the persons for whom it was intended:—"the lawless and disobedient, the ungodly and sinners, the unholy and profane, murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers," and so on. It was designed to restrain, to restrain by means of fear,—fear of declared and deserved and dreaded penalties. Even in this, its natural and proper effect, it might, by reason of the strength of sinful propensity in man, fail. But other and more extensive efficacy it had not, and could not have.

So far from having efficacy to change the affections or to communicate new principles and desires—results which we do not see flow from the prohibitions and penalties of human law—we are told in regard of the divine law, that “it worketh wrath,” and that by it “is knowledge of sin.” It worketh wrath, that is, it condemns the sinner and consigns him to punishment. And by it is knowledge of sin, inasmuch, as it furnishes a rule for men by which to try themselves, and so to understand more perfectly how far they do, or do not, conform to the true standard of right. Nay, the Apostle St. Paul goes still farther than this, and in perfect conformity with our own actual experience, represents the law—the very express law of God, which was designed to restrain and control—as becoming not the cause or the instigation, but the occasion of inflaming and exciting the sinful passions of men. He speaks of “the motions of sins which were by the law.”—“When we were in the flesh, the motions of sins which were by the law, did work in our members, to bring forth fruit unto death.” And again he says : “I had not known sin but by the law, —for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin,” that is sinful passion “taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence,”—all manner, that is, of unlawful desire. The Apostle does not in these passages mean to deny the intention or frequent efficacy of express law to control and restrain ; but he states the fact of the frequent effect of it also, to exasperate, to stir up opposition, to render more stubborn and obstinate. A heathen poet has said : “We always endeavour to obtain that which is forbidden, and desire that which is denied.” And the wise man tells us “Stolen waters are sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.” And thus the law, so far from having efficacy to direct aright, and to purify the affections and principles, does often serve to stir up to greater fury, and greater activity, the evil passions of the heart.

The law then is not designed to make the sinner righteous, farther at least, than is implied in that property of it, which is stated in the passage already quoted: "By the law, is the knowledge of sin." No doubt, such knowledge by the sinner of his own sin, as the law interpreted and understood aright gives, is one part of repentance; is the first step in the progress of the sinner to a better state; is prior to contrition for sin, and confession of sin; and is necessary to his apprehending the majesty or the suitableness of the Gospel scheme of salvation. It is in this sense, and in this way, that the law becomes a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ. It is in this way, that the believer can say with the Apostle: "I through the law, am dead to the law, that I might live unto God." And it is because of this, as well as of its directing and restraining uses, that the Apostle says, in the verse immediately preceding the text: "We know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully." In this way, the law performs an important part in the conversion of the sinner, though not the part of turning the heart to God, of making righteous. That is the province of the Gospel of the grace of God, received with true faith.

But not only is the law unable to make righteous:—"It is not" the Apostle further adds, in the first Epistle to Timothy, "it is not made for a righteous man," By a righteous man is to be understood here, a perfectly pure and holy man; one whose moral nature is in a right state, who is free from tendency to evil; whose tendencies on the contrary are all to what is right and good; who resembles Adam before the fall, when created in the image of God and pronounced good. For such a one, the establishment of express law, and the promulgation of its prohibitions and penalties is not needed. He does by nature, under the impulse of affections and principles that are natural to him, that require no prompting and no stimulus, any more than the natural appetites do in a

healthy state of body, the things contained in the law. His state, in respect of all moral duty, we can all readily see exemplified, even in our present imperfect state, in respect of some duties. There is a law that parents shall love and care for their children, and that children shall love and honour their parents. The sad necessities of a depraved nature have rendered necessary the establishment and promulgation of such a law. But in the case of those whose parental and filial natures are in a right state, as, at least, to a great extent, is the case, happily, with most, it is not the force of the obligation, or even the idea or remembrance of this law, or of its sanctions and penalties, which tells, or has any efficacy to produce that which is required. In the spontaneous exercise of the affections, without any remembrance of law, or any constraint of conscience on the subject, the parental and filial affection and duty are rendered. And what *is* the case with such affection and duty, *would* be the case with all others, if in regard of them, the heart were equally in a right moral state. In point of fact, ever as the moral regeneration of man's nature proceeds, the restraints of law are felt less, while yet the law is obeyed more; and even the authority of conscience is less appealed to, while yet its supremacy is more firmly established. And thus it is, that "the law is not made for a righteous man." In his perfectly virtuous state, he feels and acts virtuously, and in accordance with the will of God, in the spontaneous exercise of his powers and affections, without requiring the control, restraint, or guidance of positive law, and, without a feeling even of the putting forth of the authority of conscience as a law upon the conduct. The history of the Bible, in regard of our first parents, leads us back to a time when such was the case with man. He needed and had received no express moral law, nor was moved by regard to sanctions or penalties in respect of moral duties. And the words of the Apostle teach us

to anticipate a period when it shall be so again ; when the renewed soul having recovered the original perfection of its nature, and having more than that original perfection, (seeing alike by the express promise of God, and through the means of that moral discipline, to which in its way to such recovery He has subjected it, it has acquired a stability of moral condition, a permanence and power of moral principle, greater than at first) it shall need no more the guidance or the restraints of law ; but without danger to its ever overstepping the limits of what is right and good, and according to the will of God, be free to follow its own impulses and feelings.

Such, it is very certain is not the case in this present life, even with the best, although, even in this present life, under the influence of the truth of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, the believer is ever advancing towards such perfection. If we attach to the term 'righteous' the sense of perfect virtue, there is none righteous—not one. The old corrupt nature, with its affections and lusts, is not finally extirpated, even in the believer, till death breaks down the earthly house of his tabernacle. And so long as he lives therefore, there are tendencies to be repressed ; there has to be the exercise of self-denial, self-government, self-control ; there must be more or less a continual regard to the law, for guidance and for restraint. The Christian life is a warfare between contending principles. "The flesh," says the Apostle, "lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit, against the flesh : and these two are contrary the one to the other." And in this strife the law must be appealed to, and conscience must assert its authority and power to control and restrain other and evil principles.

But, out of this struggle and the repeated victories of conscience, gained through God's grace, and the constraining influence of the motives of the Gospel, there shall finally come forth another, and higher and better state, when the battle shall be ended, when the lower and

evil tendencies shall not only be subdued but eradicated, when the believer shall be like the Great Master himself, "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners," and every feeling shall be pure, and every impulse to what is noble and good. A blessed and soul-inspiring prospect surely, well fitted to cheer the fainting spirits of the Christian in his warfare with sin and with temptation, and to encourage him to boldness and perseverance in that warfare. The season of final victory shall at last arrive. Then cometh the rest which remaineth for the children of God. Not the rest of torpid inactivity ; not rest from the exertion of the intellect and the working of the affections ; not rest from exalted employments, from social converse and communion ; from continual affiance in the Saviour, or unceasing adoration of God ; but rest from the inward strife with sin, the rest of souls, that thoroughly sanctified and pure, may yield, without apprehension for the results to the unchecked impulses of their own nature.

It is the duty, and it is the interest of the Christian—for duty and interest are ever combined—to seek to attain some what of heaven in this state, even while he remains upon the earth. And he shall never reach to heaven above, whose desire and effort it is not, to have as much as may be attained of heaven here below, to have in himself as much as may be attained of heavenly tempers, heavenly affections and dispositions. And how may this be done ? Let it be considered wherein the essential characteristic of the heavenly state is placed. That is the state not of law, but of love ; not the state in which the soul acts under the constraint and terror of law, but under the impulse of love, that love of all that is excellent and good, which supremely placed on God, is in a lower measure, and according to the degrees of their likeness to Him, directed to his creatures. The present is a state in which these two—the constraint of law, and the impulse of love—do both tell on the believer ; and now the one is felt,

and now the other. The believer is not so righteous as not to need the controlling and restraining efficacy of law. Nor is he so imperfect in his moral feelings and apprehensions, as not to be under the impelling power of that holy charity, which is the end of the commandment and the fulfilling of the law. The more this latter principle prevails, the more there is of heaven in him—the more likeness to the blessed that are in heaven—the more meetness for the full enjoyment of heaven. What then produces, what strengthens, this holy principle in the soul? Surely, it is the Gospel of the grace of God, received and contemplated continually with earnest and believing mind. It is the Gospel, which enables believers to say: “We have known and believed the love that God hath to us: God is love.” And the twofold apprehension of God as loving them, and of God as love in Himself—essentially and eternally—creates the corresponding sentiments of gratitude and of moral esteem, which are comprehended in the love of God—the love of God which dwelling now in believers is made fully and for ever perfect in the heavenly state. To the Gospel then, it behoves the soul to look that desires this love, that desires to have more of this love; to the Gospel in the grace and the mercy of the provision for sinners which it reveals; to the Gospel, as manifesting at once the holiness and the infinite benignity of God; yea, to the great Author of the Gospel, the Author and Finisher of our faith—the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. Would any one have the reign of heavenly love established in his heart, and his meetness for heaven advanced; let him contemplate Christ, His divine character, the object of his mission, the message he communicated, his instructions and promises to his disciples,—his atoning death for sinners, his glorious resurrection. It is by the faith of these, the soul is renewed after the image of God. It is by the habitual contemplation of these, that the soul is transformed into the same image from

glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord. The efficacy to win, to transform, to sanctify, which the law has not at all, the Gospel has. He who receives it is saved ; he who rejects it, is condemned already ; condemned in the reign within him of that natural enmity which only the Gospel can slay and do away.

What then—let each one now say to himself—what is the Gospel to me, and what has it done in me, and for me ? Is it seldom in my thoughts ? Does it occupy little of my concern ? Do I but submit to hear of it occasionally in the public ordinances of religion ? Does it seldom, in its facts, doctrines, principles, promises and responsibilities, mingle with or influence the ordinary train of my thoughts—the ordinary current of feeling in my soul ? Or, on the other hand, is it in the distinct apprehension of my mind, yea, and in the deep—though through the infirmity of my nature and because of the temptations to which I am exposed, the fluctuating conviction of my soul—the all in all, that on which my hopes rest, in looking up to the Great God, and forward to the great day of judgment and the eternity that is to follow the awards of that day ? Does the truth of it commend itself to my understanding ? Does the grace of it commend itself to my heart ? Is the great and blessed Author of it the Saviour whom I love, the Master I serve, the Pattern in whose holy steps I seek to walk ? Can I say, as being habitually occupied with such thoughts and actuated by them, that I live by the faith of the Son of God ? It is, according to the answers we can honestly give to these two series of questions, that we can determine, whether we are in the broad way that leadeth to destruction, or in the narrow way that leadeth unto life.

X.

CHRIST'S DOCTRINE, HOW TO BE TESTED.

ST. JOHN VII. 17.

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.

THE doctrine spoken of in the text is Christ's doctrine, the doctrine contained in the Gospel records. It is undeniable that that doctrine respects matters of the highest importance, and on which sure information is unspeakably desirable—the character and purposes of God, and the duty and destiny of man. At the time when the text was spoken, it was only in process of being delivered. Now, it has existed for ages, and that, not merely in books, but as a recognized and mighty power in the world. It is not, nor has ever been, a mere abstraction. It has largely influenced the thoughts of the most thinking portion of mankind. It has largely contributed to form their opinions, to guide their conduct in this life, and to direct their expectations in respect of another life. All this it is daily continuing to do; all this, independent of the question of its divine origin and authority, and, judging solely from past experience of its inherent power over the spirits of men, all this, we cannot doubt, it will long continue to do; and viewing it simply in this light, that is, of a living and efficient power in the world, there can be no more interesting question than this: Whence does it originate? Is it a revelation from God, or is it the invention of man? the interest of the question being, however, unspeakably heightened when we further take into consideration the immediate importance of the Christian doctrine, to ourselves personally and individually, as moral and immortal,—as sinful and yet responsible beings.

Nothing, it is plain, stands out more clearly on the face of the Gospel record than the claim of the Christian doctrine to be from God ; nor is anything more peremptorily demanded than the admission of this claim, as absolutely essential to the salvation of those to whom the doctrine is made known. And there is good and solid reason why the admission should be held and represented as of so much moment. The admission of the divine origin of the Christian doctrine implies the obligation to receive it ; and when received, its tendency is to purify the moral nature of men, to guide them in this life, and to prepare them for another. The necessity of faith, as enjoined in the Scriptures, rises out of the necessity there is, that truth of any kind, in order to its having efficacy according to its nature, should first be believed, and the fact of the efficacy of Christian truth, when believed, to renew and sanctify the soul. To the believing reception of this truth, the admission of the divine origin of Christianity is a step ; and hence the importance of the point suggested to our consideration by the text, whether, namely, the doctrine of Christ was only his own, as man, or whether it is entitled to be considered and received as of God who sent him.

That this was from the beginning a point in dispute among those to whom the doctrine was made known, there is nowhere any attempt made in the Gospel history to conceal. That history never denies, or seeks to gloss over, the prevailing unbelief of the Jews, as to the divine mission and authority of Jesus. Even while the Evangelists record the miracles which Jesus wrought, and while they portray the unrivalled example of moral excellence and goodness which Jesus himself exhibited, they yet acknowledge the inefficacy of these to command the convictions of by far the larger portion of their countrymen. And it is not to be wondered at, that in later times there should be the same manifestation of unbelief, as appeared in the primitive age of the Church, or that among those

to whom the Gospel comes, there should be the same division into believers and unbelievers. If the cause of unbelief be, as the Gospel represents, in the evil heart, in the tendency of some to love darkness rather than the light their deeds being evil, this is only what was to be expected. The like result follows from the operation of the same cause, and whatever be the cause the fact is certain. Unbelief does prevail—unbelief only too plainly manifested, amidst all the outward forms and established decencies of a professedly Christian community, by such prevailing disregard of the plain maxims of Christian duty, as is inconsistent with a thorough conviction of the truth and authority of the Gospel. Evidently, there is wanting in many, such assurance as is needful to its practical efficacy, that the doctrine of Christ is from God.

There is a distinction however, to be made among unbelievers in respect of their minds and feelings towards the Christian doctrine. Some are repelled from it by its very moral and spiritual excellence, unsuitable as they feel that to be to their own individual tastes and habits; and while of such it must be said, that they do not believe the Gospel, it may be further said that neither do they desire to believe it. Others again, whose moral nature is in a different state, whatever be the cause of that difference, are attracted to the Gospel by their sense of its inherent excellencies, and by their value for the representations which it gives, of the character and purposes of God; to which, for men's comfort, in life and death, they feel there is nothing wanting, if there were but sufficient evidence to give them authority; and while of such too, it must be said that they do not believe the Gospel; in this respect, unlike the former class, it may be said, that they wish to believe it. There is much difference between those two classes, though both are infidel; yea, and though the latter, from their very consciousness of a desire to believe, and their apprehension of its biasing and mis-

leading them, are perhaps as difficult to be persuaded, as the former, from their innate aversion to the Gospel. And according to the difference, it is meet there should be a corresponding difference in the means to be used, for bringing them to an assured conviction that the doctrine of Christ is divine. That, which would not tell at all on the one class, might be powerful to reach the minds, and hearts and consciences, of the other class. Now, it is mainly to the latter class of unbelievers—those who are attracted to the Gospel by a sense of its excellence, and of whom it may be said, that they desire to believe, if they could do so honestly and truly, and with full conviction,—it is, I say, mainly to such, that the peculiar method which the text points out, for attaining an assured conviction on the question, whether the doctrine of Christ be of God, or whether he did but speak as man, unauthorized and uninspired, can be hopefully exhibited.

That method proceeds on the assumption of two things in men, a sense of right, and a sense of obligation to God to do, what is felt to be right. These, our own consciousness and our observation and knowledge of others,—the only means we have of judging of human nature, and coming to conclusions concerning it—enable us to recognize, as essential characteristics of mankind. The moral sense, however originated, conveying the peculiar idea of right and wrong; and the sense of God, of a great and presiding Superior, are common to all men. Even among the most ignorant of the Gentiles, there is the manifestation of the moral sense: “These,” as the Apostle says, “These having not the law, are a law unto themselves, which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile, accusing or else excusing one another.” Even among the most degraded idolaters, there is still manifest the tokens of a nature, which looks out of, and above itself, for objects of veneration and worship; and how-

ever strangely, the sense of moral obligation and the sense of Divine power and authority are sometimes divorced the one from the other, yet usually, and as the general rule in our nature, the two stand connected; and what is judged right, is also judged to be a part of duty to God to do; what conscience approves and commands is held to be according to the will of God, and as such of indefeasible obligation. Everywhere among men, this is a sentiment prevailing: "Such and such it is my duty to do, because it is the will of God that I should do it." Of this sentiment, we are conscious in ourselves; we see the evident tokens of it in others. It is in human nature to have this sentiment. It has been put into it by the Author of that nature. It is safe to calculate upon the existence of it in man; in all ordinary circumstances, an appeal to it, is an appeal to a characteristic of our common humanity.

I have said this sentiment of duty to God everywhere prevails. In the expression of it, men of course differ, according to the apprehensions which they have reached of the divine character and perfection; and great differences do also exist both in regard of the practical power, which such sentiment possesses over the conduct of life, and in respect of those things which are held to be of obligation, and to do which is accounted a matter of duty to God. On this latter point especially, there is a marked difference. While there are some general duties, which are all but universally acknowledged, there is yet great discrepancy, as to the amount and character of the duty which God requires. Some minds take hold of one duty and disregard others: with some, the amount of duty required is more limited, with others more extensive. It is very singular how a man's conscience shall be deeply affected with the obligation of some one duty, or the evil and shamefulness of some one sin, while it continues torpid in regard of other duties, equally clear as it might seem, and of equal authority, and in regard of other sins, of as

it would seem as unquestionable criminality. But, admitting all this difference in regard of men's views of duty,—not their speculative views, but the views which they take practically and in the actual conduct of life,—there is yet one point, in which all agree; and that is in having, whether it be practically influential or not, the sentiment of duty in respect of *some* things, if not in respect of the *same* things. There is no man, that is no man raised above the lowest forms of savage ignorance and barbarism, but feels, that in duty to God, there are certain things which it behoves him to do, and certain things which it behoves him not to do.

Now, it is at this point, in which men are alike, that the text takes them, when it proposes a means of ascertaining the true origin of the Christian doctrine; whether it be, as Jesus said, from God, or whether he did but speak of himself,—a means too, which it declares to be infallible. Let a man, it says—Christ himself says—Let a man be minded, be disposed, be sincere in purpose and effort, to do the will of God—to do that is and can only be what he acknowledges, what he believes, what he inwardly judges and feels himself, to be the will of God that he should do; and he shall be thoroughly and certainly resolved on the great question, of the origin and authority of the Christian doctrine. The text does not intimate *how*, or *how soon*, the resolution of the question is to come; but it affirms positively that it *will* come; and no man can be said to have fully and fairly tested the Christian doctrine, or exhausted the subject of its evidence and authority, or to be entitled honestly to hold lightly its claims to a divine original, who has not taken up the challenge of the text, and tried in good earnest, to ascertain the origin of the Gospel, by this way which its great Author points out.

For surely, it may be safely held that there are sufficient presumptions of truth about Christianity, to leave a man without excuse who neglects to test the authority of it, by

any fair or reasonable method which it proposes. There were such presumptions certainly in the Apostolic age, if we accept the testimony of the sacred writers, when signs and wonders, indicative of the power and interposition of God, attended the announcement of it; presumptions quite entitling any teacher of the Gospel to call on any hearer of it, to enter on any reasonable course he might suggest, in order to come to a definite conclusion concerning its divine origin. And though the age of miracles has passed away, there are presumptions of a similar kind still, in the excellence and power of the Christian doctrine itself, in the beneficial effects which it has produced on society, in the number of enlightened men who in successive ages have acknowledged its divine authority, and reposed their hopes on its revelations of God and of the life to come; in the coincidence between predictions made of it, or made in it, with actual fact, the instances of which are far too numerous and remarkable to admit of an easy explanation, on the ground of chance alone; and finally in the record of the manner of the introduction of Christianity into the world. On the ground of these and similar presumptions, Christianity is fairly entitled to call on men to test its claims, and to test them in the way which itself points out; even though that were a way involving difficulties and sacrifices, which might otherwise be avoided.

But, in point of fact, the way which Christianity does point out—which in the text, the Author of Christianity does himself point out—is one which does not involve any difficulty, or any sacrifice, which, altogether independent of Christianity or the evidence of Christianity, can be innocently or lawfully avoided. It is a way to which there can be no just or reasonable objection; for it does only prescribe to be done, in order to the attainment of a solid and assured conviction of the divine origin of the Gospel, what, independent of any such end or purpose, men feel in their hearts and consciences, that they are

bound to do, and that they will be justly condemned if they fail to do. What the text states is simply this :—"Honestly purpose, honestly seek and strive to do, what you feel and believe to be the will of God ; and in so doing, you shall come to a sound conclusion on the question, if you entertain it, whether the doctrine of the Gospel be of God or man." But who does not feel, that so to purpose and so to seek and strive, is the duty of all men, in all circumstances and at all times ; and for the neglect of which their own hearts will condemn them, even as God will hereafter condemn them ; without reference to this specific question at all.

It is on the ground of this obligation—evident and infeasible—that without attempting to show *how* the temper of mind, indicated in the honest desire and effort to do God's will, leads ultimately to assurance of the divine origin of the Gospel, we do yet feel entitled to press the trial of this method of ascertaining that point. The settlement of the question of the divine origin of Christianity is, in respect of what is required, an incidental thing, however important a thing. To do what we believe to be the will of God that we should do, is a duty of primary and independent obligation, except when performing which, we cannot be safe ; while neglecting which, we are self-condemned. The unbeliever in Christianity—that is the unbeliever in Christianity, who is yet a believer in God, and in the moral government of God—cannot object when we take him on this ground, and keep him to it. For it is ground which he himself admits ; it is common ground, on which the believer and the unbeliever are agreed. The unbeliever, thus far, is not called to believe on the ground of evidence which he thinks doubtful or insufficient, or to yield assent in the face of difficulties which stumble his reason. He is only called to do honestly, what his reason and conscience tell him he is bound to do.

It is for those who are doubters of Christianity, or unbelievers, to consider whether, or how far, they listen to

this call; to consider whether they have tested the authority of the Christian doctrine in this way; whether their consciences bear them witness, that they are truly and honestly minded to do the will of God, all the will of God known to them; or, whether all their lives, they have been and they are now, clinging to pursuits, and practices and habits, which, in their inmost souls, they feel to be wrong, to be opposed to the will of God, and neglecting duties, which whatever they may believe or disbelieve, they have no sort of hesitation in acknowledging to be binding. It is, we maintain on the authority of the passage before us, it is one result in the case of unbelievers, of this state of their minds and practice, in regard of known and acknowledged duty to God, that they continue in unbelief. But though they, not acknowledging the authority of the text, should deny this, not seeing how it can be, or how errors in practice can tell upon the convictions of the understanding, they cannot deny that it is a state immoral in itself, and which cannot but be offensive to God.

Nothing is more admirable about the teaching of Jesus than the practical character of his precepts,—their applicability, so to speak, to all persons, and all circumstances, and the immediate hold which they take upon the conscience. Here now is the question, whether his doctrine was divine or human, came direct from God, or was the result of the working of the human understanding alone. That might have been made a matter of speculation and reasoning. There are occasions, indeed, when it must be so. But see, how He leaves the points which are disputable, and on which a war of words might have arisen, terminating in no sure or stable conviction, and fixes on that, on which no dispute can be raised; on a man's doing what a man himself acknowledges to be right and his bounden duty to do; and will have no discussion, till that be a-doing, which conscience is without any hesitation enjoining.

But granting, it may be said, as indeed it must be granted, the obligation to do the will of God so far as it is known, and that there can be no inward peace or ultimate safety in any case, while habitually refusing to yield to that obligation; *how* is it that this doing of the will of God—this being truly and honestly minded to do it—can tell on the point, whether Christ's doctrine was human or divine? To this, what if we should simply answer: Try; put the matter to the test of experiment. There can be no harm in trying. There is positive good in trying; it is a positive duty to try. The required disposition, the required effort, may have a bearing on this great matter; nay, it may have just such bearing on it, as the text indicates, though no one should be able to tell *how*. To try, costs a man only to give up sin—sin against God and his own conscience. There will be gain in that, even though his doubts should not be resolved. But they will be resolved. He was the Truth who spoke the text, and He came for the revelation of the truth. His words will not fall to the ground; and he, who is honestly minded to do the will of God, will not fail ultimately to come to an assured conviction in regard of the doctrine of Christ; and to the conviction, that it was not Christ's as man, but the Father's who sent Him.

It is not the purpose of this discourse to enter at length, on the question to which we have suggested the answer given now;—the question, how the disposition honestly to do the will of God is calculated to tell on the convictions of the mind, in regard of the origin and authority of the Christian doctrine. And certainly the immediate and practical lesson of the text is not dependent, in any measure, on our coming to a correct understanding on this matter. Yet the question need not be altogether passed over; and it is thus, that an answer to it might be indicated. The Christian doctrine is addressed to the understandings, to the hearts, to the consciences of men. But the understandings, the hearts, the consciences of men

may be in a state, which disqualifies them from doing justice to the appeal which Christianity makes to them, or giving it the fair and unbiassed reception, which is necessary to a right conclusion. The understanding may be perverted by prejudice ; the affections may be led astray by prevailing passion ; the conscience may be seared by habitual opposition to its dictates. In such a case, it is not to be supposed that a sound view will be taken of the Christian doctrine, or a right impression of its evidence, its excellence, or its authority. Let a man look through a telescope, the different parts of which are not properly constructed, or not properly arranged ; and however fair and beautiful the landscape may be, to which the instrument is directed, it can only be dim and distorted views of it that he will receive—views which will in nowise qualify him, for forming or expressing a judgment in regard of it, its extent or beauty, or the objects of interest which it includes. Or, let not the telescope, through which the eye looks, but the eye itself, be in a diseased and disordered state ; and there will of necessity, be the same inaccurate apprehension of the landscape, and the same incapacity to judge of it correctly. And, as it is with the telescope and the eye, in regard of external nature—it being necessary that both be in a right state in order to see and judge of it aright—so it is, with the understanding, the heart, the conscience, in regard of moral and religious truth. They are the mind's instruments doubtless, for apprehending such truth, and judging of it. But let them be deranged and disordered, and they will no more apprehend rightly, or judge fairly, in regard of such truth, than the inflamed or diseased eye will see clearly, or judge fairly, of external objects.

Now, the understanding, the heart, the conscience are deranged and disordered by the prevalence of a sinful temper and disposition. They are not in a right or normal state and condition while subject to such temper. Yea, there is the knowledge and conviction that they are not in a right state. For conscience, though itself injuriously

affected by the existence and prevalence of sinful tempers and passions, does nevertheless testify that they are sinful, and that the tendency of them is to lead astray. In favour again, of the prevailing and efficient disposition to do the will of God, both reason and conscience testify, that it indicates a right state of the mind ; and in that state, the views which it takes of the Christian doctrine, and the conclusions concerning it to which it comes, will be as different, and as much more just and correct, as the apprehension of the landscape taken by the eye in a sound, will be more just and correct, than that taken by it, in a diseased state.

It is to the intellectual and moral nature of man, in this right—at least comparatively right and sound state—that the Christian doctrine approves itself divine. Then, it appears to the soul, as it really is, suitable for God to reveal, and necessary for the wants of men. Christ says it does this. Experience says it does. Would that every man to whom the Gospel comes, every man in a Christian land, would put this matter to the test of his own experience. “If thine eye be evil,” said our Lord, in reference to this very matter : “If thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness ;” but “if thine eye be single,” be, that is, in a sound and healthy state, “thy whole body shall be full of light.” Think not to see Christ’s holy doctrine aright through the medium of a prevailing sinful temper or passion. Such temper or passion will distort it, will present it in a false light, will deprive it of its real power to command your convictions, will prevent you from coming to a right judgment in regard of it. It will be wholly different, under the prevalence of a disposition to do right. Then you will see aright, and judge aright, and know that the doctrine of Christ is the doctrine of the Father who sent Him.

And observe in what I have said of such knowledge—of such conviction of the Divine origin of the

Gospel—I speak not of the sort of speculative conviction into which some people reason themselves, as to the truths of the Gospel, but which conviction implies no personal or hearty reception of the Gospel, nor any actual experience of its saving and sanctifying power. I speak of the way, which our Lord here points out, as the way to true faith, that faith which cordially embraces the truth and is unto the saving of the soul. I look to the consummation of the soul heartily receiving the Christian doctrine, as the very truth of God; reposing its hopes on it, guiding its conduct by it, drawing from it the peace which passeth understanding, and rejoicing in it with joy that is unspeakable and full of glory; and, as the beginning to this blessed consummation, I look to the disposition, to the prevalence of the disposition indicated in the text—the honest purpose to do the known will of God.—even though that disposition should in certain cases, be connected with but an imperfect knowledge of that will. Inward conflict and agitation, doubts and difficulties, alternate hopes and fears, there may be, ere the progress be accomplished, from this commencement to that consummation. But let the required and commended, and as our consciences testify most justly commendable, disposition reign in the soul, and the consummation will be reached; even the full assurance of a faith, that gives peace to the conscience, and that sanctifies the affections; a consummation, however excellent and desirable, which is itself but a commencement of what will terminate in a glorious immortality. For, as surely as the honest disposition to do the will of God is connected with the ultimate attainment of assured faith in the Gospel, so surely is that faith connected, with the ultimate attainment of the heavenly blessedness. And what is any faith worth, which does not prepare for that blessedness now, and terminate in that blessedness hereafter.?

The thoughtless and heartless assent, which multitudes give to Christian truth, does not make them followers of

Christ, nor will it entitle them to be partakers of his glory. One great part of public preaching and teaching has long been to distinguish, and to make the distinction to be felt and acknowledged, between such careless assent, and the honest convictions of the understanding and the heart, which alone can sanctify and save. But circumstances seem to be arising, which will do this better and more effectually, than the lessons of the pulpit. Christianity to all appearance is approaching to another great crisis in its now long history. The revival of faith in the end of the last century, is giving—perhaps we should rather say, has given—place to a revival of the old scepticism,—old though appearing in new forms; and hosts of learned, and subtle and inveterate enemies are striving to destroy the foundations of Christian faith, and seem delighted with the prospect of a result, which will throw men back, for any solution of the mystery of this life or the hope of another, on the uncertain and unsatisfactory conclusions of human reason, instead of the positive declarations of a Divine Apostle. All this enmity, covert or avowed, Christianity will doubtless overcome, as *it* has overcome in former conflicts. It is safe, under the protection of its great Head, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. But while it will not fail, the faith of many in it may fail; and the time is perhaps nearer than we think of, when the vast multitudes of the careless and nominal professors of Christianity shall be scattered and disappear; when there shall be, as sharp a distinction, as in the primitive age, between those who reject and those who receive the Gospel; and, the gulf of neutral and nominal Christianity being closed, there shall appear but two companies, the company of unbelievers, who proudly reject the doctrine of Christ; and the company of believers, who having been honestly minded to do the will of God, have ascertained the Gospel to be from God, and have proved it, in their happy experience, to be the power of God, and the wisdom

of God, unto salvation. God grant, that we be found in the latter company, earnest to us now of standing on the Judge's right hand, when another and final separation shall be made. Meanwhile, let every true hearted Christian rejoice in this; that what Christianity claims as necessary to the apprehension of its excellence and authority, and lying at the root of all true faith in it, is not the learning of the schools; not lofty powers of reason and understanding; not the accumulation of knowledge; but what the conscience of all acknowledges should be in all, and acknowledges the excellence of in any,—the upright mind, honestly disposed to do the will of God.

XI.

OUTER AND INNER CREED IN MEN.

ST. MATTHEW VI. 23.

If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness.

By the word 'light' in the text, I apprehend we are to understand the views and principles which men adopt as the rule of their conduct, and by which in actual practice they are influenced and guided. It is not, it may be observed, the same word in the original with that which our translators have also rendered 'light,' in the first clause of the twenty-second verse. That word properly denotes a 'lamp;' but this, with which we are now specially concerned, denotes the light itself which the lamp gives. The first clause directs our attention to the medium, through which religious views and principles do, as it were, flow into the soul; and the importance of such medium being in a sound and right state, in order to these views and principles proving accurate and right. But this clause regards those religious views and principles themselves, which have been introduced into the mind, and which are followed in the practical conduct of life.

Now, so understood—and it appears to me to be the only sound way of understanding them—our Saviour's words in the text are very remarkable, and justly deserve our serious consideration. They imply, be it observed, first, that there is "light in every man," or, in other words, that every man has some views, maxims, and principles, by which, morally and religiously, he is guided. They imply, secondly, that such views, maxims, and principles, though entitled to the name of 'light,' as actually leading and guiding the course of him who enter-

tains them, may yet be in reality 'darkness,' because having the same effect as darkness, to mislead and guide into the wrong way. And, thirdly, they imply the mischievous result of entertaining views and principles in themselves erroneous and unsound.

I shall not at present enter on any particular consideration of the last two propositions I have stated as contained in the text. My object, now, is to fix your attention on the first of them, namely : that there is light in every man ; or, in other words, that every man has some views, maxims, or principles, by which, morally and religiously, he is guided. And I would so fix your attention for this purpose, that you may be led to inquire what these are in your own case.

In the case of others, it is a very difficult thing to find out what the light in them is ; what that is, their real religious principles are. You come to no right judgment concerning them, by ascertaining merely what Church a man belongs to, and what the creed of that Church is. A man may belong to a Church, and know very little about its creed. Many Presbyterians would be sadly puzzled, if obliged to give account of the articles of their Church's faith. And a man may belong to a Church, and knowing its articles of faith, reject some of them as unsound. Can we calculate for example on every member of our Church receiving the doctrine of predestination, as the Church has laid it down ? And still further—and to show still more the difficulty of which we speak—a man may hold, or think he holds, certain religious views and principles, and be prepared to defend them stoutly against any one who should venture to call them in question, and yet these be not at all "the light within him," according to the sense of that expression as used by our Saviour in the text ? because they do not lead him—they do not practically guide and influence him. The truth is, that you get not at all to the "light in a man" by these means—ascertain-

ing the Church to which a man belongs—the creed which that Church holds, or the creed which he himself professes and is ready to argue in defence of. You must penetrate into the recesses of the man's nature, so to speak, to come to "the light within," in which he walks; the real views of moral and religious truth and duty, by which he is practically guided. And few men like to let others look so far and so closely into their hearts and minds. Nay, few men like to look into these recesses themselves, to drag to view, even their own view, the maxims on which they habitually act in the conduct of life. Many know not, nor could tell, what the light in them is; and how, then, shall others come to the knowledge of it?

It has sometimes occurred to me, to consider whether such knowledge could not be got from the study of a man's life; whether his creed, his real creed, that is his real, true, influencing opinions and views and principles, might not be learned from his conduct. It would be worth while to consider somewhat in detail the conclusions that would thus be derived, not from a man's judgment or his memory, but from his life. In the case of multitudes of professing Christians, it would be a very strange one indeed, and would stand in very remarkable contrast with that which they avowedly hold, and probably think they do hold. Suppose, now, we were to take the doctrine of the observance of the Sabbath. The creed of our Church is very plain on that point. You have it briefly expressed in these words of the catechism: "The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, from such worldly employments and recreations, as are lawful on other days, and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy." But this is not at all the creed which would be gathered from the conduct of very many among us. Just as surely as a stranger, seeing a Hindoo falling down before the idols of

his country, would reason to his idolatrous creed ; so surely would a stranger, seeing the conduct of many among ourselves, judge the following to be the nature of the creed, commonly entertained about the Sabbath. "The Sabbath is to be observed by going to church once a day, and then employing the whole time in recreations and amusements, and unprofitable conversation, carefully avoiding any further exercise of God's worship, in private or in public, whatever opportunity the day affords for either." What creed, equally different from the avowed one, would conduct give the key to, in regard of other matters ? Repentance, say, for example. Why, it would be this : "Repentance is not necessary, till there be some appearance of the approach of death. It is safe and right to delay it till then." Or of the reading of the Scriptures ? It would be this : "It is not necessary to search the Scriptures. It is necessary to read newspapers, and such ordinary works as approve themselves to the taste of individuals. But the Scriptures may be unopened, except in church, or for a few minutes on Sundays." What would be the creed which conduct would indicate in regard to prayer ? It would be this : "Ordinarily prayer need not be offered, or, at all events, the form of it will be sufficient morning and evening." What in regard of the Lord's Supper ? It would be this : "The Lord's Supper should not be observed except by such as are properly prepared ; but if a man is not so prepared, he need not give himself any trouble to prepare." It would be a curious creed we might construct in this way—a confession of faith for Presbyterians, very different from that framed by the divines at Westminster—yet every clause of it attested, not by texts of Scripture, like the Westminster one, but by people's own recorded doings in daily life. I do not say that such is exactly the creed of any here. But I suspect it is nearer to being so than many are aware of. It is nearer to being their real creed than is the Westminster one. And if so—if

such be the light within them—may it not, in all reason and on the testimony of all Scripture, be said to be darkness, misleading as much as any darkness could ; and in regard of conduct, and the final results of that conduct, how entire and how deplorable must that darkness be ; how fatal the errors, how irretrievable the consequences, to which it must lead !

Of course, it would not be at all safe or right to reason to a man's speculative opinions on morals or religion, from his practice ; for often these are diametrically opposed, and in none are they in continual and in perfect harmony. Neither would it be right to reason from the conduct of a man, to his convictions of duty. Often the conviction is deep, strong, clear one way ; but unhappily, inward inclination, appetite, passions, are stronger still for another way ; and the conviction is overborne, and inclination triumphs. And so there may be discrepancy very great and marked, between a man's avowed creed and his practice. Therefore it is that the method of coming to the knowledge of the "light within a man," in the sense in which that expression is used in the text, namely, by a reference to conduct, is not to be always trusted. A man may believe one course to be according to divine truth and divine law, and yet take another that is opposed to both.

It is to be observed, however, that even when under the influence of passion and appetite, a man does not act independent of opinions and principles. He must at all times have a light within him, though often that light is darkness, and always when passion predominates. A man's views and principles, in matters of morals and religion, will not long remain even speculatively right, that is in inward speculation—for he may not choose to openly acknowledge his defection—unless his practice be in accordance with them. These right views and principles must govern the passions, or else the passions will corrupt them. This is the process which usually takes place. Take the

sanctification of the Sabbath for an example. A man holds a sound principle in regard of it. But through the strength of temptation, he is again and again led to act in opposition to the conviction of his own mind on the point. By degrees, the conviction alters; the principle of duty in the matter is not so clearly perceived; finally, another is taken up; and at last, even when a man had started with the principle of the catechism in the matter, he ends by holding, not only practically, but in opinion, that which I stated reversing and parodying the catechism. Take another example, from those who give way to licentiousness. That, at first, is regarded as exceedingly sinful, as God's word represents it really to be, declaring that even because of it, "the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience." And if it be indulged in, it is indulged in against conviction, and with conscience of evil, and it is followed by remorse. But by and by, the evil passion that overmastered conscience contrives to corrupt conscience; and at last, that which at first had been judged so evil, is either judged only a light evil, or no evil at all. Therefore it is, that while I dare not reason from conduct to creed, with perfect assurance that there will be a consistency between the two in every case, yet I do say, that the creed which conduct suggests, is nearer to the real creed, than perhaps people themselves are aware of. Either it is the real creed, or it is in the way of becoming so. It is the tendency of indulged sin to vitiate the moral apprehensions of the mind. Then the light that is in us becomes darkness, and how great is that darkness.

Why, take an illustration of the mischief of a man's adopting views, maxims, principles, in regard of morals and religion which are unsound—an illustration suggested by the figurative language in the text. Suppose a man travelling in the night, and he must have a light to guide him. And he has such a light—a light which precedes him in the right way—the very way he should walk in;

but through some misconduct of his own, he contrives at one and the same time to quench that light, and to fix his eye and whole attention on another light, which, if he follows it, will lead him off his way, lead him into danger and difficulty, and effectually prevent his ever reaching the desired consummation of his journey. This is the very case of the man who adopts unsound views and principles. Even because of these, he goes further, and with less of remorse, and less chance of return, from the right way. In the glare of the false light, he misses not the true light. Satisfied that he is following his opinion, he recks not that it is a false and erroneous one; that it is a light which "leads to bewilder and dazzles to blind."

Scripture gives some examples of this inner creed, held under profession of another creed—this light within a man which is darkness, and the result of following which must be great darkness. And Scripture is the testimony of One, who can and who does look into the heart, even its inmost recesses; and who discerns all its thoughts and all its purposes, however secret from others, and undefined even to itself. You may think some of the articles of that creed which I stated, as the one that conduct would suggest, as the real creed of very many, too absurd to be really entertained. But judge whether those mentioned by the Scriptures be not quite as open to this charge. John the Baptist indicates one of them, commonly held by those whom he denominated a 'generation of vipers,' when he says to the Pharisees and Sadducees, who came to his baptism: "Think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our Father." The real governing, influencing religious opinion of these men was, that because of this natural relationship to Abraham, and the promise of God to him and to his seed, they were safe, notwithstanding any wickedness they might perpetrate. But nobody is to suppose that they avowed this opinion. Outwardly, they no doubt held the sound creed of the Old Testament—the

Pharisees particularly ; nor would they, either Pharisees or Sadducees, have ventured openly to set aside the authority of those ten words, which God spake on the Mount Sinai, and wrote on the two tables of stone. Yet the eye of the prophet detected the true creed they held ; and that effectually did so. Within, as it were, the professed creed, which was a sound one, they had another, which though unsound was the one they were really guided by. That inner creed was, what the Saviour calls here “the light within them.” And it was darkness, and their character and conduct manifested how great was the darkness. Another example of the same kind is given in the prophecies of Zephaniah, when Jehovah says of the corrupt Jews of that age : “It shall come to pass that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees, that say in their heart,”—in their heart, observe—“the Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.” There is not a word said against the avowed creed of these Jews. For any thing we know, that was quite as sound as their nation ever held. And, no doubt, it contained an article, that God does really govern the world, rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked. This they would have asserted as their creed. This they would have defended as their creed. But then they just held it, as many among us hold the doctrine of the catechism concerning Sabbath observance. And their inner doctrine was not one whit more contradictory of the avowed one, than that I have ascribed to some of ourselves is of their avowed one. That inner doctrine was ; that the Lord would not interpose at all in the affairs of men ; that good and evil, vice and virtue, would for any interposition of His fare alike. This was the light within them, by which they were guided and influenced. And plain it is, that the more they walked according to it, the greater would be their darkness ; the more firmly they held this false principle, the more likely they were to wander ; and to wander

further, and without check in the paths of sin and wickedness. There is another example of the same kind in the book of Psalms: "The fool hath said *in his heart* there is no God." There *are* some foolish enough to say with their tongues, "There is no God;" to avow that they discover no traces of a designing mind in the natural world. But there are not many so daring in their folly. Usually the Atheism that really prevails is disclaimed—is hardly admitted by men even to themselves. There is an outer creed of sound Theism; an inner of real Atheism, at least of doubt and darkness as to the being and character of God. In such a case, surely it will be admitted that the light within is darkness, and great is that darkness.

While the Scriptures thus furnish us with examples of men's inner and influencing creed, held under the shelter of another which has no influence, I may remark further, that sometimes men, in moments of confidence and frank exposure of themselves, when something has opened their hearts and disposed them to speak, or perhaps to think more definitely than they are wont to do on such matters, will give you an idea of this inner creed in themselves, by some hearty but honest exclamation, in regard of themselves or of others. "Such an one," you will hear a man say, "Such an one is a very honest man, and let people say what they will, honesty is the best passport to heaven. That's my creed." Or, "Such an one is a very charitable man to the poor; and if charity will not take a man to heaven, I do not know what will." It is in such speeches that the real creed for a moment appears; and it is curiously different from that which the man avows as a church member—curiously different from that which he hears, and expects to hear, and would be disappointed, perhaps enraged if he did not hear, from the pulpit; above all, strangely and utterly different from the plain statements of the Bible, the authority of which is yet all the time verbally acknowledged and revered.

A minister of religion does good service, when he is able in his public discourses, to exhibit the articles of this inner creed, and make those who hold them, look at them and examine them. Generally, they cannot stand to be examined, or even regarded, their folly, their groundlessness is so apparent. To exhibit them is, to a certain extent, to destroy them. It is obvious, however, that a minister cannot always get at them. They are hid too deeply in the bosom to be seen and known, except by him whose 'light,' such as it is, they constitute;—his light and guide, and influencing views and principles. But surely he may know them; he may find out, if he will be at pains, what his views on religion, the importance of it, the degree of attention necessary to be given to it, and the nature and amount of the influence it should have, really are. He can, by self scrutiny and self examination, know these. He has them—real influencing opinions on all these matters—whether he thinks of them or not. That he may be sure of. The 'light,' in that sense, is in him. But when the Lord Jesus Christ says plainly, that the light in a man may be darkness; is it not right and reasonable for every man to enquire: What is the light in me, and is it or is it not darkness? What are the opinions on religious matters which really guide my conduct, and are they right or are they wrong; are they in accordance with reason and Scripture, or are they not; are they leading me on the path of duty, or are they leading me further and further from it, smoothing the way to the soul's utter ruin, and its final and everlasting destruction? Have I taken them up at hap-hazard, or because I like them; or on grounds which my reason and conscience did, or do still, approve? Do I hold them, after examination by all the lights, which God hath put within my power? Do I hold them as a thinking and reasoning man? Do I hold them, as knowing that I am responsible to God for the manner in which I came to hold them, and the tempers and

dispositions I manifested, in considering and adopting them? Would to God we did all betake ourselves seriously and patiently to such enquiry. First, What is the light in us; the real opinions we hold on religion? Second, Is that light, or is it not darkness? Are these opinions true and sound, according to right reason and God's word, or are they not? No one can ever be a practically religious man, or reach ultimately the happiness that here and hereafter is the portion of such, without thinking of religion, and making it a subject of anxious concern. Yet this is just what many will not do. In half an hour's time, it may be feared, the word, the true and awakening word of the Lord Jesus Christ, which has now been brought before them, and all the considerations which it has suggested, will have passed away from their minds. And when will there be any proof, that the seed of the word has been permitted to take root or to spring up in their hearts at all? Who believeth our report? To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? Arise, O our God! Plead thine own cause with us. Visit us with the spirit of repentance. Give us light to know the truth, and grace to value it, to love it, and to obey it. Arise for our help, and redeem us for thy name's sake.

XII.

GOVERNMENT OF THE THOUGHTS.

PSALM CXIX, 113.

I hate vain thoughts ; but thy law do I love.

THERE have been many questions started, in regard of the power which a man has over his own thoughts. Some would almost have it that he has no power over them at all ; that they pass through the mind independent of the will ; being either suggested by outward things, or when originating in the mind itself, guided by laws of association, so rigid and invariable, that in virtue of them, the character of successive thought is determined with the same certainty and regularity, which attach to the results of mechanical contrivance. It would be idle to enter here on any metaphysical discussion of this matter. We assume the popular impression on the subject, which is the reverse of that we have now expressed, and involves a belief in the power of the mind to exercise at least a certain control over its own action, and to determine the subjects of that action. In dealing with the consciences of men, we may safely proceed on the existence and strength of this impression. The Apostle evidently did so, when announcing the importance of habitually remembering the truths of the Gospel, and the danger of forgetting them ; he called upon the Hebrews to give the more earnest heed to them ; and so to prevent them from slipping out of the mind.

It is undoubtedly true, that very much of the thought which does actually pass through our minds, is little if at all, influenced by any exercise of power in the mind over that thought. A very large portion of our mental activity

is called forth by objects and events, which immediately strike our senses, independent altogether of any volition on our part—the sights and sounds of the material world around us, or the remarks addressed to us, by the members of the society in which we move. And even when thought is not so suggested, and, as we may say, compelled, by external things and persons; when the mind retires within itself and is employed in sober reflection, there are long intervals in which there is no conscious exercise of power over the subjects of thought. One thought succeeds another, connected by links and laws having power, according to the constitution of our nature, so to guide the operations of the mind. But then it is possible for the mind to break the train of associated thought. It can, whether by setting at defiance the laws by which thought is connected, or in virtue of other principles of association than those which ordinarily guide the operations of the understanding, suddenly call up another subject of thought and consideration. It can, from being comparatively passive, assume the attitude of a judge of the train of thought which has been passing through it ; and whether under the promptings of conscience, which may condemn such train of thought as wrong, or of reason which may pronounce it foolish, or of prudence which may declare it to be dangerous, or of wisdom which may suggest another, better and more profitable exercise of the understanding; it can apply itself to new matter of thought, and set all its faculties in busy operation, on the new subjects thus presented to them.

Now, if this power we have, it is of infinite consequence, surely, that we should exercise it aright; that we should exercise it under the guidance of moral and religious principle. Assuredly, we shall be held most solemnly responsible for our exercise of it. It is the thoughts of the man which make the man, which determine his character and the character of his actions; and how important then the power of suggesting, altering, modifying, guiding

these. Christianity claims the government of the thoughts, that it be ordered in conformity with its own precepts and principles. It never professes to hold the actions of the external life, as of account in themselves. It proposes to purify the external life, by first purifying the thoughts which are the immediate source of moral life in man. It tells of a great and blessed Agent, whose work of condescension and mercy it is, so to purify the thoughts; and thereby to prove the quickener of the dead in trespasses and sins, and the strengthener of spiritual life in those, to whom spiritual life has been already communicated. But in this work of the Spirit of God, the moral and intellectual powers of men are also to be exercised. When God works, He works *in* men, to *will* and to *do*; not *for* men, that they may remain in tranquil idleness and inactivity. That God works in us is a just ground of comfort and encouragement: for if He be our helper, how can we fail of success? That God works in us is a ground too, for fear and trembling, for awe and apprehension; for if we obstinately refuse to cooperate with him, thus working in us, how much guilt must we of necessity contract? But it is no ground at all for us to refuse putting forth all our energies; on the contrary, it should be felt as an inducement to us to put them forth to the uttermost, in the doing and accomplishment of all that, to which God calls us for His glory, and for our own good. And specially should we do so, in regard of the government of the thoughts, in the exercise of the power which we have of guiding them, and of turning them to right and proper subjects.

Now, in any consideration of the proper exercise of such power, one thing will very speedily appear; that there is a class of subjects, namely, which it is the tendency of the natural man to drop out of mind altogether, and which it is the temptation, even of the spiritual man, to have in his mind far too seldom. That class of subjects is religious subjects—the great truths, principles, precepts of religion,—

the religion of the Bible—the religion of Christ. In themselves, these are unspeakably important and sublime. To men, all men, if they did but know or feel their true position, they are of overwhelming interest. It is not desired that they should constitute the only subjects of thought. The necessities of life, which, being of God's ordination, are not to be condemned, either in themselves or in the results to which they directly lead, render that impossible. We may, nay we must, think of common business, common duties, yea and common, if innocent, recreations. There is much wisdom in the saying, as applied to the Divine government, that a good and wise father desires to see his children at proper times in the playground, as much as he desires to see them in the school room and at their studies. But then, there is an utter derangement of the true order of things—the order of things rated at their real value and importance—when worldly business, worldly duties, and worldly recreations displace subjects of religious thought from the mind altogether, or when the only place allowed to such religious subjects of thought is a very humble and a very limited one.

It is plain, from their own nature, that these subjects are entitled to be often, habitually, and solemnly considered. It is plain, that men need to be influenced by these truths, for the sobering of their minds, for the purifying of their hearts, for the guidance and sanctification of their lives. It is plain, too, that men cannot be suitably influenced by them, except they are often present to the mind, and often taken into earnest and serious consideration. There is not very much difference, morally and spiritually, except in the greater guilt which one may have, between the man, who has never heard of a Saviour, and him, who having heard of Him, never thinks of Him. But how little are the truths and duties of religion the subject of men's thoughts! Take those not making, nor

entitled to make, any special profession of religion, and enquire of them how much time, in a day, or week, or year, is occupied with the serious contemplation of such matters ; and if they answer you according to conscience and truth, it will soon appear how utterly insignificant the heed—the attention—which they give to the subject of religion. In the great majority of cases, it would be only vague and fleeting thoughts of that subject, to which they could at all lay claim ; even these, perhaps, suggested and forced on them from without, and implying no sustained, or habitual, or anxious contemplation of them. From morning to night, and from one year's end to another, the immortal mind, which God has endowed with such powers and capacities, is busied with subjects of thought and consideration, among which, the thought of God, His will, or His salvation, has seldom any place, if indeed it has a place at all. Take those again, who, neither in hypocrisy nor without reason, do make some profession of religion ; who have on their spirits an awe of the majesty and authority of God ; who have in their hearts some sense of the love and grace of Christ ; and though, of course, they cannot make such a confession, as that which truth compels others to make, because they must have more frequent and earnest thought of Divine things ; yet even they would, on any searching enquiry, be compelled to make very humbling acknowledgments. It would, in very many cases, appear that the mind turned but too seldom and too reluctantly, to the consideration of these very truths, which do yet stand connected with its enjoyment of present peace and with its hopes of ultimate glory and blessedness. It would appear that the world, its occupations, and interests, and pleasures, and cares, not only occupied the place legitimately due to them, but had given to them, a far larger portion of time and attention, than could be reasonably so conceived of, and such a portion as entrenched materially upon, and often alto-

gether engrossed, the time and attention, which are due to religious truths. It would appear, that the tendency was not so much to exchange ordinary for religious subjects of thought, as religious for more common and ordinary; and that the things which they have heard, and with joy received from the Gospel of Christ, they were very prone to let slip from their minds.

Now, if there be such complete absence, or almost complete absence of religious thought—serious that is, and sustained religious thought—in the one class, and such confessedly partial presence of it in the other, what must of necessity be the result? In the one case—the former case—it can only be the continuance of an impenitent and sinful state, in which neither the authority of God is recognized, nor the grace of Christ, nor the terrors of the judgment to come. To be religious a man must surely think of religion. To repent, to believe the Gospel, to live as a Christian, in any sense, which any man has who reads the Bible or has any knowledge at all of true Christianity, requires thought, thought of religious truth, and much of it too, serious and earnest and continued. The very first part of the change which must come over an ungodly man, in order to his becoming a true Christian, is a change in the subject of his thoughts. He must think of religion; he must give his mind to the thoughts which religion suggests of God, of judgment, of eternity, of the Saviour's work, and love, and power, of the way of obtaining an assured and personal interest in the Saviour, and the method in which a sense of the Saviour's love is to be manifested and proved. In the other case, the latter case, the case of the believer acknowledging his want of spirituality of mind, it is obvious that deficiency in such spirituality, in regard of his subjects of thought and meditation, must occasion slow progress in the graces and virtues of the divine life. Such subjects of thought furnish the very food of the soul, in the life of faith

and godliness. The truth is the grand instrument provided by God and made use of by His Holy Spirit, for the moral renovation of men. But what is truth, any truth, if unthought of, or little thought of? It is only in proportion, as it is regarded, weighed, considered, dwelt upon, that it can exercise its proper power and influence over the heart and mind. Our blessed Lord connects great spiritual blessings with the abiding of his words in the minds of his disciples; not their knowing them merely, not their receiving them merely, but their having them "abiding in them;" which can only mean their having them habitually present to the mind, and making them the subject of their thought and consideration.

Again, therefore, we insist on the unspeakable importance of exercising, and exercising rightly, the power the mind has to choose its own subjects of thought, so that religious subjects of thought may be considered in proportion to their importance. In such exercise of power, constraint will be necessary. The thoughts will require to be turned out of that channel in which they habitually run, and into another, to which there is often a strong natural disinclination. But such constraint, if we are impressed with a sense of the importance of it, the duty of it, or the necessity of it, is possible; and if it be persevered in for a time, there will come into operation a law of our nature, which will lessen the necessity for constraint, and make that, which at first was difficult become at last easy, and as of nature. That is the law of habit, the law according to which, that which we do often and regularly, we come to do easily and as a matter of course, scarcely requiring any exertion of the will. The power of habit, in matters requiring active exertion, we are all familiar with. But the power of habit extends to thinking as well as acting. If our thoughts are, by constraint of will or by constraint of circumstances independent of the will, often turned to certain objects, there is found at last a habit of

contemplating such objects, independent altogether of the original force which acted on the mind, so as to lead it to such contemplation. The mind, in any interval of ease and freedom, when sensible things are not immediately pressing on it, takes willingly and naturally to these its accustomed subjects of contemplation, and continues the consideration of them till some necessity arises for a change. It is possible for a man therefore, in virtue of the power which he can exercise over the subjects of his thought, to render any particular class of subjects, habitual subjects of meditation; to make them so in the end, without the necessity of much, perhaps, of any conscious exercise of constraining power; to make them so, even in seasons when the mind is left free to wander at will, choosing its own subjects of thought and consideration. This can be done, and often is done, in regard of subjects of thought not religious. But it can equally be done in regard of religious subjects. The degree of constraint, of power to be exercised, may be greater, because of the greater reluctance of the mind to dwell frequently and habitually on these. But the same law which has operation in regard of other subjects has operation also in regard of these.

And how unspeakably desirable it is, to have such habits of religious thought and religious meditation formed and established; to have the great truths and topics of religion so familiar to the mind, that the mind shall, in its moments of most unrestrained freedom, naturally revert to the consideration of them, and they shall have the like place in the musings and reveries in which all men indulge, as his gold and his possessions have in the thoughts of the miser, or his home and his family circle in the mind of the man whose heart is warm with domestic affection; that a new channel of thought be, as it were, formed in the mind, and instead of the heretofore engrossing concern, on which the mind, disengaged from outward things, was wont to fall back, of what is to be enjoyed of sensual

pleasure, or what is to be gained of worldly possession, or what is to be known of common business, or what is to be learned of science respecting only things earthly and material, there be as ready and natural a turning of the mind, to the contemplation of God, the high attributes of His character, the great principles of His government, the various revelations of His will, the manifestations of His grace and love—above all, in the person and work of Jesus Christ the Saviour. Such frequency of religious contemplation might not make a man religious, that is give to religious principle ascendancy over the will and motives of action, so that all shall move in willing subserviency to it, as of right entitled to the supremacy in man's nature. But it would be a step towards it, and a necessary one, and an important one. Religious truth has power over man's spirit fallen as it is, and enslaved by evil passions as it is, if it can only have access to it. Nor is it easy to resist that power. In point of fact men do resist it easiest and oftenest, not by meeting it directly in open combat, but by dropping religious truth out of their minds, and avoiding the occasions and circumstances in which it would be pressed on them. Then in the case of those who are under the influence of religion, and have any honest desire to grow in grace and godliness, it is plain that such frequency of religious meditation, such, often recurring thoughts of divine truth, must tend to their advancement in the divine life. The benefits resulting from an established habit, a confirmed tendency of the mind to revert to the consideration of moral and religious subjects, are twofold. First, evil thoughts—vain, foolish, unprofitable thoughts tending to evil—are thereby excluded. The mind must be occupied with something. Such thoughts cannot be dismissed and the mind left a blank. They can only be displaced by other thoughts, better and holier; and they can only be kept out, prevented from returning, by keeping the mind so occupied with better and holier thoughts, the presence

of which, by excluding sinful and frivolous thought, would save also from the sinful and frivolous actions and course of life, to which such thought if habitual leads, and to which in all cases it tends. But secondly, the habit of moral and spiritual contemplation does not only benefit by excluding evil and preventing evil, but by doing positive good. It excites good and holy feelings ; it strengthens pure and holy affections ; it confirms right principles ; it leads to a right discharge of duty ; it forms, what is so desirable, habits of duty, giving to the right course of conduct, not only the authority of conscience and the arguments of reason, but in the end, the advantage also of habit, to secure its being steadily pursued. To have such habitual tendency to the contemplation of moral and religious truths is to be spiritually minded ; and to be spiritually minded, says an Apostle, is life and peace.

Whoever, then, has any sense of duty to God on his spirit, or any concern for the salvation of his own soul, or any desire to make advancement in Christian virtue, should see to the establishment within him of such habits of religious thought. That is a thing which can be done ; but it requires the forth-putting of all our energies ; for in the case of all, there are many obstacles to be overcome, in the antipathies of the natural mind to the religious obligation, which the contemplation of religious truth exhibits and enforces, and in the existence of other habits of thought, by which the mind is already enchained. But in the honest forth-putting of our energies towards the accomplishment of a good and wise end, there is no cause for despair. God himself, who in the control and government of his vast empire, overlooks not the cares nor despises the necessities of any of his creatures, is ready to help us. The blessed Saviour, who though now exalted, is still touched with a feeling of our infirmities, is willing to make his grace sufficient for us and to supply all our need. And we have the promise of the Spirit, whose province it is to

make willing, and to work in the soul, to will and to do. This is one of the very ways in which we are to obey the Apostle's precept: "Work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling;" and in regard of which, there is both caution and encouragement, in the statement "that God worketh in us."

I have spoken of one law of our mental nature, of which it behoves us to take advantage in seeking after spirituality of mind—the law of habit. There is another, which should also be made use of; that by which a particular train of thought can be so associated, with external things frequently appearing to us, or external circumstances frequently occurring around us, that the one inevitably suggests the other. With the objects of material nature around us, with the events of daily occurrence, trains of serious thought may be so associated, as that the appearance of those objects, the occurrence of those events, shall as a matter of course suggest religious reflection. It is a wonder that such is not more the case, independent of any effort of our own, or the establishment of any habit, through means of such effort often repeated; a wonder that the beauty and skill and goodness, so apparent in the material world, should not be more suggestive to us of the great Creator; that the mind should not rise from the work that is seen, to the unseen Worker, and by easy steps pass to the consideration of His character, His government, His laws, His Gospel of grace and mercy to the fallen children of men; a wonder that the events of Providence, often so impressive and furnishing such fruitful subject for serious reflection, should pass away, without reminding us of the unseen hand which guides all, of the infinite mind which contrives and arranges all, and of the great ends which that infinite mind appears to have in view in such contrivance and arrangement, and the lessons which we should learn, from what we are permitted to see of them. Too plainly does it appear from this very circumstance, that

man, in his natural state, likes not to retain God in his knowledge. But if he would pass from that state, he must do so. If he would advance to the perfection of his nature he must ; and so it behoves him by active effort, such as he is competent with God's help to make, to establish such associations of things seen and temporal with things unseen and eternal, and daily to increase the strength and number of them. In this, as in all things, our Lord Jesus Christ is the great Exemplar ; and if we diligently and carefully peruse His history, we shall see both how rooted and established in Him was the habit of religious reflection, and how the most common and ordinary events seemed to suggest such reflection. Examples of this must readily occur to all. The water at the well of Samaria suggested the grace of the Holy Spirit. The loaves, which the greedy multitude sought for the sustentation of their bodies, suggested the meat which endureth unto everlasting life. The presence of a little child suggested the tempers necessary for admission into the kingdom of God. And so in innumerable instances—so much so that this peculiarity of “drawing his doctrines from the occasion,” as it has been called, is a marked characteristic of the teachings of Christ. But it is a characteristic which could not have existed without an established habit of religious thought, and of connecting that thought with familiar and visible objects.

As we regard our own moral and spiritual well-being, it behoves us to make conscience of this matter. It is recorded, that in the time of the English Commonwealth under Cromwell, when certain persons, then called Triers, were appointed to make enquiry into the qualifications of the ministers of the Gospel for their work, and to test them, not so much by the ecclesiastical community to which they belonged, or the form of worship they preferred, or their attainments in learning and science, as by the evidences they could give of their own personal conversion to God,

and their holy living as His servants and children, a certain eminent minister of the Puritans was brought before the Triers, and asked the evidence he could give of his character as a genuine Christian. His only answer—all that was required of him indeed, for it gave immediate satisfaction—was: “I make conscience of my thoughts.” Then only may we count ourselves Christians, when we do the same; when we feel that we are giving to conscience—and to conscience enlightened and guided by Christian truth—the guidance and government of our thoughts.

XIII.

INFLUENCE UPON OTHERS FOR GOOD OR EVIL.

PSALM XL. 3.

He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.

NEXT in order of importance to the gift of speech, by which thought is expressed, and one mind is enabled to have direct intercourse and communion with another, is the art of writing, by which thought can be communicated to the distant in space and the distant in time, and made the common property of the world. And it is by the latter, very greatly more than by the former, that power and influence can be exercised by any one mind over others. It could be only a small and inconsiderable number, whom either reverence for David's kingly dignity, or sympathy with his poetic feeling, or his religious experience, could attract to listen to the detail from his own lips, of his spiritual distress and his spiritual deliverance, compared to the innumerable multitude of willing auditors, which the record of these, in this sacred song, has gained for him. By that record, he has been enabled to speak, not merely to a sympathizing crowd around him, but to the whole Church, Jewish and Christian—the Church in every age—all thoughtful spirits, in all time, touched and impressed with a sense of their relation to God, and desirous to know and comprehend the mystery of His dealings with the children of men. The history of the mental conflicts and troubles of the Psalmist, and the song of praise which God put into his mouth, when the season came for his deliverance, lose not their interest nor their moral efficacy, with the lapse of ages. They who fear God still listen to

what God did for his soul ; and still, as he said they would, they are moved thereby, to " fear, and to trust in the Lord."

There is something very noble and sublime in the idea thus suggested, how the thoughts and the feelings of one mind, may, in consequence of the powers and capacities with which our nature is endowed, be enabled to exercise an influence over all succeeding generations. In David's case, it is true, there was more than any mere natural gift, to give value to the workings of his mind. In addition to his devotional temper and his poetic genius, he was endowed with the prophetic spirit. He spoke, as he was moved by the Holy Ghost, of Him who was to be a Light unto the Gentiles and the Glory of Israel. And it is reasonable to believe that the same Divine Spirit, which dictated his words, should take the necessary means for preserving them, and diffusing the knowledge of them, in so far as were required for the edifying and comforting of the Church. But it is not only to men under such direct inspiration from God, to whom it is given to transmit their thoughts to distant ages, and in virtue of such transmission to exercise a never ending influence, on the successive generations of mankind. This is the high prerogative of genius, to communicate an immortality of power to its own reflections and imaginings, so that these, clothed in winged words, shall be circulating from mind to mind throughout the world, long ages after the spirits which gave them birth have passed away for ever from this mortal scene.

In proportion, however, to the greatness of the power bestowed is the greatness also of the responsibility incurred. Such power, as we have spoken of, may be used and has been used, both for good and for evil. And as in the one case, it is justly the object of admiration and reverence, so in the other case, it is as justly the object of abhorrence and fear. Genius can instruct, but it can also corrupt. It can lead in the straight path, but it can also lead astray from it. It can kindle noble aspirations in the

soul, but it can also fan the flame of evil and degrading passions. It can be the servant of heaven, but often it is the minister of hell. And, as it is delightful and elevating to the soul to trace the thoughts of a single mind, richly furnished and endowed of God for that very end, in their progress over the world, enlightening and purifying—giving life and power to social affection, to moral principle, or religious feeling—and in their progress down wards through successive generations, still serving the same beneficent purpose, increasing the sum of human virtue and human happiness; so is it saddening and fearful, to trace the progress of thought degrading and demoralizing, and confirming or raising up, from age to age, a succession of slaves to sin and Satan, and to contemplate the responsibility of him, who gives birth to such corrupting reasonings and reflections. It is a fearful thing to corrupt even one human spirit. The evil done is so great, and it is, by merely human means, so irreparable. But how much more dreadful it is, to set in operation a means of corruption to which no limit can be assigned either in regard of extent or of duration; and which may be as efficacious, or more efficacious for evil, a thousand years, after he who originated it has been sleeping in the dust, as when it was first thought of. We can conceive it one reward of a glorified spirit, to be able to trace the results of the thoughts, which in the days of its earthly being, it had given to the world; and as we know, in the moral regeneration of mankind, the exalted Saviour himself reaps the fruits of his mediation, sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied; so, though in lower measure, may one of his servants, while no wise taking the glory to himself, but humbly rendering all to God, have unspeakable satisfaction—increasing even the joys of heaven, and giving new impulse to its songs of praise—in witnessing the extending and permanent influence, of what he had been honoured and enabled to do for the world. And however it is, it might be one fearful part of the punishment of a

lost and outcast soul, to trace in the same manner the results of its labours in the world ; to see one after another brought under their malign and withering influence ; and to feel, that during all time, it is in effect at least, a corrupter and a destroyer. Such a contemplation might, it would seem, thicken the gloom and aggravate the woe, even of that place of darkness, where the worm dieth not, and there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

It is impossible to disconnect great powers from great responsibility. Of them to whom much is given much also will be required. Yet, would it be unfair to measure the amount of guilt contracted, by the amount of mischief done ; or to judge, in contemplating the ungodliness or immorality, that are sometimes connected with great powers, that these surpass in degree or in guilt, what is to be found in less highly gifted minds. It is the sad prerogative of genius to give currency to its thoughts, to give expression to its feelings, such as shall live in men's minds and influence them, even when those feelings and thoughts are evil and corrupting. And so in effect they *are* more mischievous, than if they had perished in the mind and heart in which they arose. But we are not to suppose that because some have this power, or from their exercise of it, that such thoughts and feelings are of necessity more frequent in them, than in persons of humbler abilities. The evil thoughts, wicked in regard of God or man, the dissolute imaginations, the impatient complainings, which the one class may have expressed, the other may equally have felt and cherished. And it may be a difference, not of moral guilt, but only of mental power, which exists between the two. The intention to corrupt would of course, in either case, aggravate the guilt. But apart from this, which is not always to be inferred from the expression any more than from the thought of evil, the indication of an evil and corrupt heart may be the same in both ; a state of the affections, which we are constrained to believe, a holy God must condemn, and which unrepented of, can only terminate in misery.

The power of genius, giving clearness to the conception and force to the expression of what is evil in a man, can give us fearful revelation, of the wickedness which exists in other minds than our own. But it is not needed, either to the existence of such wickedness in ourselves, or to our knowledge of it. We can look into our own hearts. Though the door of our neighbour's heart may be shut unto us, there is one open, through which we can penetrate into our own. If the evil thoughts that have found access there, and encouragement to lodge and linger there, could be written down, with the precision and the energy which genius can communicate ; were such expression given, to the feelings which conscience testifies have both risen and been cherished within us ; would we have reason to boast of ourselves, as compared with those whom we condemn ? Might we not be overwhelmed with shame and confusion of face, and forced to confess that the absence of power, rather than the presence of principle, has saved us, from being as much as others, originators of moral mischief and corruption ?

And originators of moral good—of what shall tend to the spiritual well-being of men—or of moral mischief, tending to their corruption and misery, we must and shall be, to some extent ; however short we may come of the lofty powers with which some are gifted, and by means of which they can speak, not to the few, but to the many, not to the men of our age only, but to the men of all ages. This is the point to which I wish to direct your attention, because it is the practical point in which we are all interested. It is not lessons for genius, or for those gifted with extraordinary powers, which we need to lay down, but such as suit the case and condition of ordinary men. And *this* is such a lesson ; that every man, how humble soever his gifts or attainments, how lowly soever his position in the world, or how limited soever the sphere in which he moves, is capable of influencing others ;

and not only others around him, but others that shall come after him, in the lapse of time. And he may influence them for good or for evil. And he may do it, and to some extent he will do it, in the very way, and on the very principle, according to which the Psalmist expected, that many seeing the history of his spiritual experience, and the song of praise which God put into his mouth for his deliverance, would be moved thereby to "fear and to trust in the Lord."

It was by revealing the workings of his mind, in regard of God and of divine things—it was by expressing his religious convictions and impressions, declaring how he had felt towards God, and how God had acted towards him—that he expected to exercise a beneficial influence upon others. And he did so, and has done so, and will continue to do so, as others also have done, in the same way. It is purifying and strengthening to a man's fear of God and faith in Him, to be permitted thus to enter into the secret mind of another, and to discern there, the sure tokens of religious faith and reverence. As there is no greater trial to a man's own faith, than the conviction that others—others in whom perhaps he had trusted—are liars, destitute of moral and religious principle, so it is a source of strength to witness the true feeling of religion, and listen to the record of a real and true religious experience. There is a sympathy which we cannot help feeling, even when it condemns ourselves, with the impressions and convictions in others, which are thus communicated to us. It is this sympathy which gives the charm and power to religious biography; to the accounts more especially of the workings of men's minds, in remarkable periods of their lives, or on the approach of death. And such sympathy, a religious man can and will call forth, by the expression of his own feelings and convictions, though such expression should be given only to few, and never communicated to writing at all. It is very greatly, we do believe, by such sympathy that religious feeling is, as it were, propagated and perpetuated, from

one generation to another. And thus it is, that a truly religious man's experience, though in humble life and of humble gifts, may, though less extensively, yet equally surely, and abidingly, continue to have influence, not as written down in a book which men may study, but as communicated directly to other human hearts, and influencing them, while they in their turn influence others; and so the succession of God's people is kept up in the world. Exercise an influence for good. You cannot tell when or where that influence shall cease, or indeed, if it ever shall cease. Less directly and extensively, but as surely and as permanently, as the experience of the great King, who could embody it in the noblest strains of poetry, and who was honoured to combine it with the revelations of prophecy, the experience of the humblest believer, may, simply by the honest, and often perhaps the undesigned expression of it, have its place in bringing many to "fear and to trust in the Lord."

And there is a like efficacy, like in power, though miserably unlike in result and tendency, in the revelation of the workings of an evil and sensualized nature. Unhappily there is that in all, which is but too prompt to sympathize with evil, and to find pleasure in the details of the workings of whatever passions do most influence us. But, as it is out of the abundance of the heart that a man speaketh, whether the heart be renewed or unrenewed, he that is under the influence of evil passions will give expression to them; and by this very expression, whether he designs it or not, prove to others a source of corruption. These others may be few, because his influence may extend to few. It may perhaps extend no further than to his own family, that is to those very individuals, in regard of whom he is most sacredly bound to see to it, that no such influence, but the very reverse, be exercised. But it may be not the less effectual, or the less abiding, inasmuch as they, in their turn, may exercise the same injurious influence and so the example of evil keep up the practice of

evil, and each servant of sin, however humble, have his share in building up the kingdom of Satan, and increasing the number of his subjects in the world. Whoever proves the means of corrupting the principle of a man, converts that man into an accessory of Satan, to instil the same moral poison which has been infused into himself, into the hearts of other men. It is in this way the moral pestilence spreads among the members of our race, and is transmitted from one generation to another, in perpetual succession. It is ever the tendency of moral evil to perpetuate itself. Give it a beginning, and there can be no limits set to its growth or its duration. Jereboam, the son of Nebat, we are told in the sacred history, caused Israel to sin; and he and his family were therefore cast off from the throne of Israel. But did the sin cease with them? Why, we are told that it continued to be practised, till the throne of Israel was itself overthrown, and the children of Israel were carried away into a captivity, from which they have never since been gathered; and the record, of each of the guilty successors of Jereboam, is summed up, with the emphatic and often repeated sentence, that "he departed not from the sins of Jereboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin." And so it is, in a greater or lesser degree, with all sin. It is a contagion spreading itself and transmitting itself. Many see it, and know it, and are thereby tempted and corrupted.

The influence, which men have and exercise upon the moral and religious condition of others, for good or for evil, appears most striking when we witness the exemplification of it in men gifted with lofty powers, and placed perhaps in circumstances giving full scope to the exercise of these powers. But it is an influence of precisely the same kind which men of humbler powers exercise, and for the exercise of which they are equally responsible. Nor can any man shake off this responsibility. It is not allowed to any man to say: "Am I my brother's keeper?" as if he

had nothing to do with the question, of the moral well-being of others. God has not bound us so loosely together, that we can thus isolate ourselves from other men. Man lives not to himself alone. He lives so as to affect and influence others also, and he is bound to see to it, that such influence be good, good in the intention with which it is exercised, wise in the manner, and as far as in him lies, good, too, in the result which is produced.

We have spoken generally of the influence of a man's life and conversation, be that good or evil, on the moral well-being and principles of others, and the responsibility which the possession of such influence involves. It may be wise, however, to consider the amount of influence which may be exercised, the amount of good or of evil which may be done, not by the general tenor of a whole life, but by such parts of a man's life and conduct, as include only a very small portion of the time allotted him in the world. It was but a small fragment, so to speak, of the moral and spiritual history of David, which was to work with such happy efficacy on the souls of men, leading them to worship God, and to trust in Him. And it may equally be, where an evil influence is exerted, the doings or the sayings, not of months or years, but of idle hours and unguarded moments, which prove pernicious. It is important and awakening to consider the effects—the extent of the consequence in men's minds—which may be and which often are produced by witnessing, not a life-long exercise, but somewhat, of good or evil in another. An act of genuine benevolence may thus prove to others a stimulus to unnumbered manifestations of the same temper. An act of self-denying virtue may strengthen in innumerable bosoms the spirit to resist temptation. A word spoken in season, and on the side of reason or religion, may operate to confirm the faith, and render stable the principles of many who were almost beginning to waver. While, on the other hand, a rash expression of infidel or ungodly sentiment,

or an act of moral weakness and inconsistency, may serve to unsettle the principles and give loose to the passions of those, who hear the one or who witness the other, to an extent which he who utters the one, or is guilty of the other, takes not at all into account. I put the matter in this way, because it serves to shew the responsibility which attaches to every portion of our conduct, and how we can never shake ourselves free from the restraints of principle and prudence, in a well founded, apprehension that no mischief shall be done—mischief by us irreparable—in tempting or defiling the consciences of our brethren. This responsibility, our Lord has emphatically expressed, when He said: “Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.”

And the view of this responsibility is in a very high degree impressivè and awakening—impressivè and awakening, even to such as are comparatively little moved by other considerations. It is true, that a man who is immoral and ungodly, impenitent and unbelieving, sins against his own soul. He puts in peril his highest interests for time and for eternity. But sometimes, he can less be moved by the consideration of his own guilt and danger, than by the consideration of the guilt and danger in which, by his ungodliness and unbelief, he is a means of involving others—it may be others that are near and dear to him. It should be indeed a bitter reflection to any man, that he has proved, and is proving, by precept or example, a means of misleading and corrupting others, and making them choose and travel in the way that leadeth to destruction. Every heart responds to the sentiment so strongly expressed by our Lord. “Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must need be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh. It were better that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”

And let not any one lightly dismiss from his mind the

thought that he may be one by whom the offence has come. We may offend another, in the Scriptural sense of the term, by directly soliciting him to sin, directly soliciting him to forsake what appears to him the path of duty, and to act in some point in opposition to the dictates of conscience ; or we may do so, by instilling into him erroneous and wicked principles ; but it is quite possible, as we have seen, to become, to use the expression of St. Paul, "partakers of other men's sins" indirectly, by the force of our example, by the influence of the station in which we are placed, lending it to the side of what is vicious or dangerous ; by tacitly conniving at faults, which we are bound to reprove and to testify against ; or by withholding that necessary instruction, which, from the relation we bear to others, we are bound to give them. Is there no one here self-condemned when this view of the matter is pressed upon his conscience ? Are all here free from that corrupting, or strengthening and increasing the moral corruption of others, which is necessary to the indulgence of licentious passion ? Are all here free from the guilt of having initiated others into habits of profligate indulgence, and encouraged them to get the better of those scruples of conscience, by which they have long continued to be annoyed and restrained ? Has no one here helped to do away the reverence which another had been taught in his native land and in his father's household, to entertain for the duties of the Sabbath and the sanctuary ? Is there no one here, who by sneers or taunts, at any conscientious scruple in another, has sought to weaken the power of conscience in that other, and to make him ashamed of doing what he thinks right ? Is there no one here, who has encouraged another in the excesses of intemperance, or taught or encouraged another to utter a convenient falsehood, when the truth would not have suited for the moment ? It is for each to press these, and such questions, on his own conscience, for his trial in this matter, and for bringing him to repentance if he be therein guilty.

It is the good and happy influence, however, which one man may exercise on other men, which the text specially calls us to contemplate, the influence which one man's testimony to the power, and reality, and blessedness of true religion, has to bring others to fear God and to trust in Him. This is an influence as delightful, as the other is grievous to contemplate. We tremble at the inextricable closeness of the bonds by which men are knit together, when we think of the sins of each encouraging others to sin ; but it is delightful to think of the same union when the result is to communicate, from soul to soul, the sentiment of piety and the power of principle. If there be a doom pronounced on those by whom offences come, it is also said of those, who turn many to righteousness, "that they shall shine as the stars in the firmament for ever and ever." Are we then, the question rises, are we in the condition to bear this testimony to religion, a testimony in substance the same with that of David, when the new song was put into his mouth, even praise unto our God ; to bear it from our own experience, from our own deep convictions ; to bear it openly and honestly ; to bear it not in words only, but by deeds giving the uncontrovertible stamp of a holy life to the sincerity of a religious profession ? The experience of David, as recorded in this psalm, while it foreshadows the subsequent experience of a greater than David, even of Him who was David's Lord as well as David's son, is but an example of the ordinary experience of a true believer. The horrible pit and the miry clay represent to us the condition of a sinner, convinced of sin and the danger of sin, and seeing no way of deliverance, and finding no footing on which he can hope to stand in the judgment ; all the delusive notions which the evil heart suggests, and which pass current in the world, vanishing away before the new light, the light of divine truth, which has dawned upon his mind. David's cry, and his patient waiting for the Lord, suggest the resource, to which the

awakened soul is constrained to betake itself. The setting of his feet upon a rock and establishing his goings, indicate the courage and confidence of the believer, when, by faith, he sees and receives Christ as all his salvation and all his desire. And the new song is the glad expression of holy gratitude, which a sense of God's grace and mercy calls forth in every believing soul. Has such awakening been vouchsafed to us? Has such light from heaven dawned on our spirits? Have such prayers to heaven ascended from our hearts? Has Christ been so revealed to us? Have we had the new song, bursting from our hearts and lips, even praise unto our God, because of the great salvation?

If we are strangers to all this, how shall we hope, not fearing or trusting in God ourselves, to be able to bring others to do so.

If of this we are conscious, then surely our very experience should animate, as it will also enable us to lead others to the same merciful God and Saviour, who has so abundantly blessed us. It is not meant that the moral regeneration of any soul should terminate with that soul. The principle of life and love is to spread and be communicated from heart to heart, till the desire of the Lord be finally accomplished; till the people whom God hath chosen be all redeemed out of the enemy's hand; and Christ hath presented them to Himself, "a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing."

XIV.

CALLING EVIL GOOD AND GOOD EVIL.

ISAIAH V. 20.

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil ; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness ; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.

Among the natural endowments of mankind, next to the gift of reason and understanding, is that of speech. The latter gift indeed, if it does not give its chief value to the former, does at least unspeakably enhance the importance of it. This it does, both by extending the range of thought in individual minds, and the power of thought over the general mind. Even the highest intellect would not be able to proceed far in processes of reasoning on any subject, without the use of words. Words serve as signs of thought, and fix and concentrate thought, and preserve it in a way the mind can most easily grasp and remember ; and when reproducing thought which had passed through the mind, again to be considered or dealt with, they do so in a way more orderly, and by which the mind loses less of the fruit of its former exertions than could otherwise be accomplished. Thus they enable individual minds to make advances otherwise impossible in the apprehension of truth, and in the apprehension of the relations of one truth to another. And then how inconsiderable would be the advance, which any one mind, even if it were of the highest order, could make in any of the manifold subjects of thought to which the human mind applies itself, if it could not compare the results of its exertions, with those of other minds like itself ? Or how could the race advance, if in successive ages, each individual mind had to begin at the same starting point, instead of at that which had been attained and communicated by previous thinkers ?

But while speech is of this paramount importance to the

general or individual exercise of thought, it is nevertheless to be remembered that it is not without certain disadvantages. Words help the mind in thinking ; but often they play strange tricks with the mind, either serving it instead of thought, or leading it very far astray from sound and just conclusions. Nor is it difficult to see how this may be. A word is not always the representation of one simple thought or idea. Often it represents a cluster, so to speak, of associated thoughts or notions. And, if in the outset of any process of reasoning, the mind fails to take in all these, or having taken them in, in the progress of such reasoning, drops out some of them, the conclusions though verbally, will not be really correct, or just. The mind, towards the end, has been thinking of something different from what it thought of at the beginning, though, because of the continued use of the same word or words, it is unconscious of the change. So it is in reasonings between one man and another. Nothing is more common, than for the one to attach to certain words a meaning which the other does not—a meaning more perfect or less perfect—at all events different ; and so they come to no agreement, and marvel each, at the want of logical discernment in the other, because they are all the while thinking of different things, at least of things not quite the same, but blind to the fact, because they are making use of the same words. It is thus, that while words do greatly *help* thinkers, they do also sometimes *hinder* them, and prove occasions of many unsound conclusions and of much needless and unprofitable debate.

It would not be entirely out of place here to enlarge on this power to hinder in the investigation and attainment of truth ; or in the consequent need there is, of watching words, and making sure, what we and others mean by those we use, since words wrongly used or understood may lead to wrong conclusions, in regard of religious, as well as of any other truth. But such is not the subject to which I wish now to call your attention, at least not wholly

nor strictly—that being not so much the power of words to lead astray logically, in the apprehension of truth, as their power to lead astray morally, in the apprehension of duty. This is what the prophet suggests to our consideration in the text. He speaks in it, of those who “call good evil, and evil good ;” and on all such, he pronounces ‘woe ;’ evidently intending to represent such misuse and misapplication of words, as criminal and dangerous, and tending to confound moral distinctions, both in the apprehension and practice of men.

Observe accurately what that is, of which the prophet speaks. It is a use of words. It is calling good evil, and evil good. Now this may, or it may not, imply the, at the same time, *thinking* the evil good, or the good evil. There are persons in whose apprehension moral distinctions are to a greater or less extent confounded. Under the influence of education, of long habit, of sinful passions, or of sophistical reasonings and speculations occurring to themselves or suggested by others, they mentally apprehend evil for good, or good for evil. The moral sense or faculty in man is not such, that it cannot be thus deadened or perverted. It often is. It was so among the heathen of ancient times ; it is so among the heathen of our own day. And it is so among those in Christian countries, who remain ignorant and inapprehensive of Christian truth. Hence the need of divine revelation to the heathen. Hence the need of instruction in the truths of revelation to those who might know them, but do not. One proper designation of the Gospel is ‘light.’ It casts light on duties, which the mind had not previously apprehended to be such. It exposes, in their true character, sins which the mind had not previously apprehended to be such. In all countries in which this divine light has shone, the standard of duty generally acknowledged, is raised vastly above what it had heretofore been. In every heart into which this divine light has penetrated, there is an

apprehension of duty, deeper, clearer, and more extensive than that which generally prevails. Much that the world counts good, it apprehends to be evil. And somewhat of that the world counts evil, it apprehends to be good. The correspondence of our own moral convictions, come to under Christian influences, with the plain statements of Scripture, is what gives the highest certainty, as to what is truly good and truly evil, in a moral point of view.

It is natural to suppose and easy to shew, that innumerable and grievously evil consequences arise from mistakes on this matter—thinking evil good, or good evil. Take the former of these—thinking evil good. You have an example of this, in the case of persecution for conscience sake, constraining a man by violence to adopt another's views of religion or his mode of worship, or punishing him in person or property, if he will not. What, in one view of it, can be more absurd and unreasonable—as if any man's thoughts and feelings could be so constrained? What, in another view of it, can be a more atrociously evil and wicked violation of the rights of individual consciences? Yet it has always been more or less practised. And men, imprisoning and murdering their fellow men, because holding different views of religion from themselves, have thought themselves right, judged the intolerable evil of persecution *good*, and counted that thereby they were doing God service. Our Saviour warned his disciples that the time was coming, when whosoever killed them would think that he was doing God service. They would be persecuted and put to death, not by men acting in opposition to conscience, but acting in obedience to a conscience perverted and misled. And so it came to pass. The Church was first persecuted. Then it began itself to persecute ; and who can recount or imagine the cruelties and the horrors which have proceeded from this mistaken sense of duty? Or, take the latter statement of the text—thinking good evil. You have an example of this, in the notions which

the ancient Church early took up, and to which the great body of those nominally Christian do still adhere, of the intrinsically superior holiness of the state of celibacy. It could were not be more clear or certain, if it were written on the heavens above us, by the finger of God, and to be read every hour of every day by all his creatures, that such was not the state which God intended for man generally. How could anything be more disastrous, than to set a stigma on the virtues and charities which grow out of the conjugal and parental relation, as was done by a mistaken, though no doubt, conscientious morality. The results of persecution are more patent, but not less evil. In later times, we have been accustomed to think, as connected with this mistaken notion, of the evils of monastic institutions for male or female. What then, if great as these have been and are, such institutions themselves were a reform—and an important one—on the practices which grew out of the Church's counting God's good ordinance evil, or if not exactly evil, yet so much less good, as to be, in the common apprehension, a proof, in those who submitted to it, of inferior principle. This single false notion tended to and went far to produce a general laxity of morals, and in particular to lower that very purity, which it was supposed to exalt. Sound views of Christianity have, to a great extent, at least amongst Protestant nations, extirpated these special mistakes in regard of moral duty. But there may be, nay we cannot doubt but there are others, under which the general mind of the Church still labours, and which only a more correct understanding of Scripture, and a more earnest and enlightened application of Divine truth to matters of duty, will ultimately do away. And it is a great service which a man renders, who by such correct understanding and earnest and enlightened application, makes plain to the general mind, and causes to take hold of the general conscience, a duty before unknown or neglected, or who

clears away the conscience of evil, from doing what is in itself right and good. The Reformation did this on a great scale; and there is room for it still—room for enlarging and correcting the general views of duty, according to Scripture rule and Scripture principle. Such more perfect accuracy of moral apprehension is at least a step to improvement in moral practice, and to the averting of those evils, which follow as the natural consequence under the government of God, from the general acquiescence in mistaken views of right and wrong—the morally good and the morally evil.

But while there are who misunderstand duty, and are chargeable with no insincerity, but on the contrary speak, as they really do think and judge, while yet calling what is really evil good, and what is really good evil, the text seems specially to point to another class of persons—those, namely, who without any such mental misapprehension, knowing, if not so well as they should do or might do, yet knowing very well, the distinction between good and evil, vice and virtue, right and wrong, do nevertheless, in conversation and intercourse with their fellows, presume to alter in words, the distinction which they at heart acknowledge, and “to call evil good and good evil; to put darkness for light and light for darkness; to put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.” It is, as I think, a sin of the tongue, which the prophet condemns, not a mental misapprehension of things in morals, but a knowingly and intentionally misnaming them—naming them, not according to their true nature, or even according to their apprehended nature, but the reverse. There is evil intended in doing this, by him or them who do it first. There is evil in following in the wake of those who do it. And there is evil accomplished by the doing of it first or last. There is in so misnaming good and evil respectively, a disposition to corrupt, by confounding men’s views of right and wrong; to lead them *from* the practice of duty, and *to* the

practice of sin ; and too often the corruption is accomplished. False views are taken up first, and evil practice follows next, by those who habitually hear such misnaming of good and evil.

In the text, the prophet seems to speak of a complete reversing of moral distinctions—people calling good evil, and evil good, without limit or reservation in what they said. And so it may have been in his day ; and so it was, we can readily suppose, in respect of the worship of Jehovah, and the worship of idols. But in matters of the morally right and the morally wrong, where the decalogue is well known, and the authority of the Christian exposition of the decalogue is professedly at least acknowledged, men do not just venture to reverse the ordinary designations, and in so many words to say, that obedience to what the moral law given in the Bible commands, is ‘evil,’ or doing what the moral law given in the Bible forbids, is ‘good.’ That would be going too far. It would probably shock themselves. It would certainly shock their neighbours hearing them do it. It would not answer the purpose either of comforting themselves in evil, or corrupting their neighbours to evil ; and while the thing to be done is in substance the same, it has to be done, in a more covert and less offensive way. The word ‘evil’ must not be directly applied to what is ‘good,’ but some other word or words, which answer the same purpose, lowering it, condemning it, ridiculing it, all tending to loosen the conviction that it is, or can be, of any serious consequence, whether it be or be not disregarded—all tending to do away any conviction that it is of binding obligation. The word ‘good’ must not be directly applied to what is ‘evil,’ but some other word or words, tending as much as possible to diminish its evil, or the guilt of committing it ; making it appear a light thing, nay going farther than this, and making it out to be what a man would rather be guilty of than not. It is the intention of such words, so applied,

to lower in men's minds the excellence and the obligation of what is good ; to lower in men's minds the apprehension of the demerit and guilt of what is evil. And use of words, in such ways, covertly yet really calling good evil, and evil good, has the effect contemplated ; and they, who without direct intention to produce such effect, do yet in thoughtless levity lend themselves to such use of words, contribute to produce the effect and fall with others more criminal, under the sentence spoken by the prophet in the text : " Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil ; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness ; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter."

I suppose one might go over the commandments and find in respect of each of them, some of this depreciation of good and softening of the guilt and enormity of evil, in the current language of society. Chiselling and jobbing stand in the new and comfortable vocabulary of the world, for cheating, stealing, plundering. Indulging a little, social habits, taking a drop too much, stand for the low besetting vice of drunkenness. The fast, the gay, are the soft terms for the licentious ; those whom the Bible calls " whoremongers and adulterers, whom God will judge." When a man is about to lead a woman into immediate guilt and degradation and ultimate shame and misery, it is taking her under his protection. To get into debt to tradesmen, without means to pay, is to be a little extravagant ; instead of to be a selfish, unprincipled scoundrel, as if a man should not break stones on the road, live on bread and water, and beg them, if they cannot be otherwise honestly obtained, rather than incur debts which he has no prospect or means of paying. And so in respect of other vices. The hard word which expresses the plain truth, as both human and divine law view it, is set aside for one which expresses more sympathy with the offender, and less condemnation of the offence. And the effect is just this : I do not think so ill of the sin ; do not

you think so ill of it either. And so men encourage one another in the imagination that sin is not so evil as it really is, not so surely a source of dishonor and wretchedness as it really is, not so opposed to God's will as it really is, not so sure to draw down his condemnation as it really is. I verily believe there is unspeakable mischief in this way of softening down the names of sins, even when it is done thoughtlessly and in conformity with common usage; and it behoves all to call sins by their true names—names expressive of their moral obliquity and hatefulness—who would not be partakers of other men's sins, or suffer under the woe righteously and solemnly denounced against those who "call evil good, and good evil; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness."

I have said that the sin denounced in the text is specially a sin of the tongue, and so it is; *calling* evil good, and good evil. But it is not to be supposed that it is not therefore also a sin of the heart. Is it not out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaketh? The truth is, all this light speech about sin proceeds from light views of sin. But how delusive and deceitful is every such view of sin, every view of it, as in its nature trivial and inconsiderable. For the truth of this, may we not appeal alike to reason and revelation, and to the consciences of men, awakened, quickened, informed, by either or both? What is sin? It is opposition to the will of God. That is its nature, its essence—opposition to the will of God. And in what principle of reason can it ever be imagined that such opposition should prove a light or trivial matter? The will of God is no capricious or arbitrary will, but the result of his infinite perfection of nature and character. Opposition to his will, is opposition therefore, to perfect wisdom, perfect justice, perfect goodness; opposition to the eternal reason and fitness of things. Can such opposition fail to have in it the fruitful

seeds of disorder, confusion and misery ? or what but woe can be the portion of the creature that strives with the Creator ? But the terrible evil of sin may be judged of from the actual dealings of God with sin. No relationship can be more easily or surely traced than that which subsists between sin and misery. No one can deny that the latter is the offspring of the former. If we take divine revelation as our guide, we shall trace all misery to sin, as its cause ; and even if we should ascribe to sin only the misery, which we can see it directly or indirectly causes, that is enough and more than enough, to dissipate every imagination that sin can be in any case of but little moment. There is but little misery in the world, inward or outward, which may not be traced to it. Were sin swept away from our world ; were men's hearts delivered from its thralldom, and its enticements, and its promptings ; did holiness to the Lord dwell and reign in every bosom ; this world, plagued and blighted as it has been, would scarce need the removal of a curse, to make it a Paradise again, an Eden for the sinless children of the Most High. It is in the existence, the strife and the victory of sinful tempers and passions, that the immediate causes of the world's misery are to be found ; the misery of individuals suffering under the domination of others, or feeling shame, degradation and remorse, in the consciousness of their own misdeeds ; the misery of families, their disunions, their mutual complainings and quarrellings ; the misery of nations, their wars, and battles and bloodshed. And while God does thus speak in His Providence, what says He in His Word ? How does the Bible represent sin ? Why, it says, they are fools who make a mock of it. It says that God cannot look on it but with abhorrence. It says the face of the Lord is *set* against them that do evil. It should startle indeed, to turn from the general society of men, in which sin is so gently spoken of, so palliated and apologized for, as to seem but a light thing at all ;

where many a display of it calls forth only the mirth of the unthinking and foolish ; in which, it is often gaily confessed, as it is playfully charged on the offender, and no thought of the righteous and all-seeing God disturbs the tranquillity of the carnal mind ; it should startle, I say, to turn to the Bible, to learn from it how differently God views sin from the creatures who have fallen away from his service, and to listen to the terrible denunciations against it, which are scattered so profusely through the pages of Prophets and Apostles. Above all is it impressive when He speaks, who is the Word and the Wisdom of God, and who came from the bosom of the Father to reveal Him unto men. No harsh indifference to human weakness, no needless austerity, did Jesus ever manifest. His heart overflowed not more with love to God than with tenderness to man ; and more impressively therefore, than even the thunders of Sinai, does it bespeak the evil of sin and the certainty of the judgment of Heaven against it, when He, all meek and merciful as He was, declares to us, in language not to be mistaken or misunderstood, that rather than sin ourselves, we should cut off the right hand, we should pluck out the right eye ; that rather than lead another into sin, it were better that a millstone were hanged about our neck, and we were drowned in the depths of the sea.

Be it observed, that this latter offence, this leading others into sin, certainly encouraging and confirming in the practice of it, is just what is done by the practice denounced in the text—calling good evil, and evil good. Men are greatly influenced by the opinions of one another ; often most unreasonably and most injuriously. Does such a one speak lightly of such and such an offence ? Does he see no great or serious harm in it ? Is it thus gently that the world in general judges of it ? Then surely my conscience is too tender, too sensitive, too easily roused in regard of it. I need not be so ashamed of it, or afraid

to renew it. What others think and speak of so very lightly cannot be so very evil. This is the way men judge,—inclination strengthened by the opinion of others, carrying it over conscience, and reason, and scripture, and giving the victory to sin. How needful then, that men capable of thinking and speaking accurately, above all Christian men, should call things by their true names, never giving in to the palliating titles for sin, which are current in the world; never giving the advantage of their sympathy to evil inclination in other men's hearts, but bearing open and decided testimony to the evil of sin and the obligations of duty.

And observe, it is plain, undoubted sins, I would have thus testified against and called by their true names—not habits of society, or practices, the morality, the expediency, and the lawfulness of which, if to be judged at all correctly, must be judged of by motives and circumstances, and not by the acts themselves. Let not good people spend their zeal against sin, by denouncing worldly amusements. They would be better employed in denouncing worldly and prevailing iniquities. Denounce fraud and falsehood; denounce licentiousness; denounce cheating and swindling; denounce drunkenness; denounce tale-bearers and evil-speakers; denounce selfishness and greed; call these by their right names, loathe them yourselves, teach others to loathe them, stand for the right, the plainly and manifestly right. You run no risk in condemning these things, in throwing the whole weight of your influence and your abhorrence against them. There is a kind of religion which will put up with the practice of some of these. Nay, perhaps there is not one of them, which some have not contrived to amalgamate with a profession, and perhaps with some sense, of religion. Now the questions, whether a person with any true sense of religion in him, may dance, or sing, or go to entertainments, or listen to concerts, which many are so exercised about, and so anxious to have author-

itatively solved, I would leave in abeyance, or leave to the consciences of individuals ; but I would have no hesitation in solving and proclaiming the solution of any question, that might arise about such profession or sense of religion, as consists with practices certainly sinful. I do not say that such profession or sense of religion is necessarily hypocritical ; sin is very deceitful, and the heart of man is very deceitful ; and men are very willing to be deceived, and do contrive very expertly, and wonderfully and completely to deceive themselves. But hypocritical or not, it is worthless. Religion consists in a certain sense of God, and a certain sense of, and adherence to, what is right. There is in it moral feeling and devotional sensibility. Neither will do without the other. But if the two were dissevered, the former ranks first, moral feeling and moral obligation, the root of good in man. The religion that consists with sin, unmortified, unsubdued, may smooth a man's path to hell, but will never raise him to heaven.

It was a very wise resolution of the Psalmist, which he records in the thirty-ninth psalm : " I said that I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue. I will keep my mouth with a bridle while the wicked is before me." Heart sin is our own sin. Kept there it stops with ourselves. But sins of the tongue affect others, disturb or corrupt others. And no sin is greater than to lower a man's standard of good, and lessen his apprehension of the guilt and evil of disobedience to God's plain law, as is done by giving smooth names to mortal sins. The prevalence of such a smooth phraseology of evil is token of the prevalence of a lax morality, and tends to make it laxer still. It comes of evil and produces evil. Every good man should set his face against it, and all should keep habitually in mind the Prophet's words—nay they are God's words—in the text : " Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil ; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness ; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.

XV.

THE DANGER OF RELAPSE INTO SIN.

ST. MATTHEW XII. 43-44-45.

When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out ; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there ; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.

THERE can be no doubt that the doctrine of the influence of evil spirits is taught in the New Testament ; and the fact of such influence being exerted against us should be a motive to watchfulness, and to prayer for the promised aid of a higher, even a divine, influence to be employed in our behalf. But I would not choose to refer to the passage before us, as having been intended to explain the nature of that influence, or the manner of thinking and acting among evil spirits. For, for anything I know, our Lord may in that passage be only adapting the style of his instructions to the notions that were commonly entertained by the Jews, in respect of such spiritual beings. And it may be, He is to be understood as speaking, not literally, but parabolically. At all events, it is not speculative notions about spiritual beings, that we are concerned to gather from the passage, but the sentiment of it—the moral lesson which it is intended to convey, for the guidance and regulation of our conduct. And that is what I desire now to seek and to set before you.

That we may come to a knowledge of this, let us take the passage literally. There is an evil spirit dwelling in a man ; so dwelling in him that he counts the man his house, his home. But he goes out or he is driven out. In some way he is dispossessed of this house or home. Restless and dissatisfied, he purposes to return. And when he does return,

he finds the man ready for the reception of such a visitant. Yea, and in such a state, that that evil spirit sees that more such visitants might find room and accommodation, and so in the exercise of the diabolic temper, which rejoices in extending the reign of sin and misery, he goeth and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there, and the last state of that miserable man is worse than the first. He is in more abject bondage to sin and Satan than he was before the evil spirit first left him. Now surely, keeping strictly to the phraseology of the text, we are not to suppose that in every instance in which an evil spirit goes out of a man, or is driven out of a man, this is a description of what follows. If that were so, the going out of evil spirits at our Lord's word, from these poor afflicted persons who experienced His grace and power, when He was upon the earth, was no blessing, but rather the reverse of a blessing; and instead of thereby overthrowing Satan's kingdom, He was preparing the way for the extension of that kingdom. Plainly the passage could never be intended to convey that idea. But, as plainly it does teach, that sometimes that does happen which it describes; that sometimes such result is produced. There are circumstances in which such result, doleful and disastrous, may be expected. And what we are concerned to know is: What are those circumstances? Does the text give us any key to the knowledge of those circumstances?

But take the passage not literally, as we have done now, but as having been spoken parabolically, figuratively, in accommodation to Jewish notions and Jewish opinions. Then it might be thus understood. An evil passion that has dwelt so long in a man's heart, and that has been yielded to and indulged so much, that it has acquired the force and power of habit, is, by some influence brought to bear upon the man, made to give way and resign its old place and power in the heart. There is the sin of it. There is

the shame of it. There is the misery of it. There is the danger of it. And the thought of one or all of these so weigh with the man, that he feels constrained to seek to expel it from within him. And to all appearance it is expelled from the heart where it has dwelt and ruled so long. But by and by it returns, that evil passion which had seemed to be forever banished. By and by it revives, that evil passion which had seemed to be dead and buried. The old habit resumes its old ascendancy. Yea, and conscience and all its auxiliaries in a man's reason, reflection, and experience, are so wearied, and weakened, and exhausted, and overborne in the unavailing effort which they have made, that evil passions spring up in the heart other than had been known before, and the last state of the sinner is worse than the first. He is tenfold more the slave of sin, than he was before the temporary freedom which he hoped to enjoy, from the evil passion that had first had rule over him. Now surely it is not thus that the mortifying of an evil passion, the expelling of it from the heart, the throwing off the chains of a sinful habit, does always terminate. That would be contrary to truth and to experience, inconsistent with both the precepts and the promises of God's word. But the text teaches this most certainly, that so it does sometimes terminate. Such is sometimes the miserable result of moral effort, and moral effort followed with some measure of success. And in so teaching, it stands opposed neither to truth nor to experience. There are circumstances in which such result, sad and deplorable as it is, may be expected. And as before, so now we say again, what we are concerned to know is, what are these circumstances? Does the text give us any key to the knowledge of these circumstances?

I have just said that such result does sometimes follow. In teaching that it does, the passage before us stands not in opposition either to truth or to experience. I

appeal to yourselves if such is not the case. Who has not seen cases of such result? A man begins to fight with some indwelling and besetting iniquity. And for a time he does so manfully. Conscience moves him to do so, conscience roused by providential dispensations or by the preaching of the word; and it seems as if the man were changed, and as if the shackles of his bondage had fallen from off him. The old enemy seems to be out of him; the evil spirit ousted from the circle of the heart's sympathies, and desires and affections, to be away, as the text has it, in the dry desert, seeking rest and finding none. When lo, there is re-action. There is a resurrection of the old sin. There is the introduction of new sins. Conscience loses its temporary supremacy, and is weaker now than it was at the first. It happens to the sinner, according to the true proverb; "The dog is turned to his vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." Cases of this nature all of you must have observed, who are capable of observation. Aye, and some of you, in your own persons, may have had experience of all that has been said, and be able to testify from such experience to the deplorable termination of a repentance and reformation, that once gave fair, but flattering and deceitful promise, of a new heart and a better life. Assuredly, there is no denying the truth of the teaching in the text, when that is understood to declare, not what is always, but what is sometimes, perhaps often the case. And again the question recurs, what makes it the case, and how is such result to be avoided?

I say how is such result to be avoided? Assuredly it is only the result, that we should desire to be avoided. The beginning is every way to be wished for. One is glad and should be glad always, to see an unclean spirit going out of a man, a proud spirit, a greedy spirit, a sensual spirit, a lying, cheating, defrauding spirit, an envious, malignant, revengeful spirit, an irreligious, worldly, unbelieving spirit. Who

would forbid a man striving with devils such as these and seeking to cast them out? Who would not wish him God-speed in the conflict, and hope well of him if the conflict seemed to terminate successfully? Assuredly the beginning of any good work, any work of God in the soul, must be the expulsion of such devilish tempers and dispositions. In a sense higher and more extensive, than as applying only to the Ordinance of the Supper, men cannot drink of the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils; they cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial?" Truly it is a joyful sight to see a man wrestling with sin, his sin, his special sin—the unclean spirit that hath found its house and home within him—and dismissing it to the dry places of the desert. But as it is said: "Let not him who girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off;" so let us not think of him who but begins to fight, as if he had won the victor's crown. The battle may terminate in a disgraceful overthrow and a bitterer bondage. The fairest promise of goodness may pass away like the morning cloud and the early dew.

But how to avoid this? The danger of it is very great. The unclean spirit does not like the dry places of the desert. It wanders about there seeking rest and finding none. It has a vivid recollection of the house it has left. It would fain return, fain have its home again in the man's nature, and have its hold again over his motives, and feelings, and principles of action. In other words the evil passion in a man is not extinguished, extirpated, dead. The flame of it can be fanned again into life. It is easily restored to activity and to supremacy; and its victory over the conscience makes conscience easier overcome of temptation, weaker and less powerful to resist the seductions of evil. How then to escape falling

into a worse, instead of rising to a better condition ! How to have the door of the heart shut against its old occupant, and the evil company it brings with it ! How while promising myself liberty, to escape becoming the servant of corruption ! How having thrown off the yoke of a sinful bondage, to escape being entangled therein again, so that the latter end shall be worse than the beginning ! Does the Saviour in the text give any intimation, where the danger lies and how it may be avoided ?

I know not that He does ; unless it be in that place where He teaches us how the unclean spirit, when he returned from the desert, found the house which he had left. It was empty, swept and garnished. There was no occupant ; there was none to dispute his entrance ; there was none having prior possession, and prepared to fight to retain the possession. The citadel of the heart was without a garrison. It was swept and garnished, fitted by nature for a garrison ; but there was none in it. And so the enemy had but to walk in and sit down. Now to express this plainly, it is simply to say that no feeling, no principle, no affection, had taken the place in the heart, of the evil passion which had been for the time expelled. The heart was empty ; it was swept and garnished, fitted and furnished by its natural constitution and appurtenances, to have some ruling affection. It needed such ruling affection ; it craved it, it could not do without it, and rather than be without it, it took back the old affection that had been tried, condemned and banished. Now this is a sound view of our nature, and points to the manner by which the return of the unclean spirit—a relapse into evil—may be prevented ; without which, such return and relapse are unavoidable.

It does not signify what the ruling passion in a man has been or is ; you can never be sure of displacing it effectually and permanently, except by the introduction of another. One spirit may go out of a man, but it can

only be kept out, by another taking its place. Take drunkenness, for example—the devil of drunkenness. That is an unclean spirit, if any be such, and there are ten thousand arguments of force and weight, why that devil should be expelled. But are you sure of its expulsion by setting forth such arguments alone ; or, if they prove strong enough to make a man abstain for a time, are you sure of his permanent reformation, unless some other taste take place of that which is surrendered—taste for intellectual occupation, for social converse, for the pursuit of wealth, or for the principle and the exercises of devotion ? Leave him without such taste, strong in him as that he has forsworn, and it would be utterly unsafe to trust him with the means of indulgence, or in circumstances of temptation. Say to a man, who has the passion for intoxicating liquors in him, say to him simply, Thou shalt not drink ; and although the command be backed and enforced by the most stringent and powerful motives, it will not effect a reformation without the introduction of a new taste. For a season it may ; but if the unclean spirit returns and finds not its place occupied, so that admission cannot be gained, it will have a firmer hold than ever. Who has not seen a drunkard rush back again, after some temporary reformation, with fresh zeal and eagerness, into the indulgence of his degrading passion, becoming more a slave to it and to the evil which it brings along with it, than he had been before ?

There is frequent experience in mankind of one passion or principle displacing, and permanently displacing, another which had once, and for a long season too, had ascendancy in the heart. You see this happen with passions or principles which are both evil in themselves. You shall see a base love of sensual enjoyment, that has reigned for years in a man, succeeded by as base, if not a baser, meaner, more sordid avarice. Or you see the pursuit of pleasure surrendered for the pursuits of ambition, both followed perhaps with little regard to the claims of duty or of con-

science. There is often a happy change in such displacing of one passion by another ; that introduced, if not religious, if not moral, according to any high standard, yet being less inconsistent, more congenial with religion and morals, and standing less in the way of a greater and more favorable change. The spirit that comes in is, if not good, at least less evil and unclean than that which goes out. It may however be the reverse, and an evil passion be succeeded by one worse, more powerful and less easily dislodged. But what we are concerned to notice now, is how it is that any one is dislodged effectually. It is not by mere force of will or of authority, so to speak. It is not by a simple action of ejection that you are to clear the tenement of the heart of its objectionable occupant. Keep the house empty, and the tenant will return ; you must put another tenant into it, who will keep possession against all intruders.

This principle is but of late beginning to be practically recognized, in the schemes that are formed for raising and improving the condition of mankind. In former days, legislators and statesmen contented themselves with the prohibition and the punishment of vice and crime. Then punishment was the only means thought of, or at least extensively employed, to work on a man, to expel and keep out any unclean spirit, to resist and subdue any evil passion. Now it is felt that it will not do to leave the house empty, when such occupant is removed. Both to expel and to keep expelled, there must be other occupants provided. By moral and educational means, other and higher tastes must be introduced—tastes inconsistent with the old and evil ones. And this principle should be regarded, not only in the case of crimes, which society is constrained to punish, but in the case of frivolities and follies, which religion according to any high standard condemns. It is easy to denounce the evil passions that are roused by gambling. It is easy to denounce the immorality that seems to be almost inseparably connected with theatrical entertainments. It is easy to

denounce the extravagance and vanity of the ball room. But to supplant these, no mere prohibition will do ; no mere demonstration of either their silliness or their sinfulness. You must give people something better. You must put in them tastes for something better. You must raise the standard of excellence, and infuse capacities and provide opportunities, for other and higher enjoyment. A man will not be won upon to give up his present enjoyment, unless you provide him another. He may under certain influences do so for a time, but the unclean spirit will return, and more potent and more formidable than before, bringing with it seven spirits worse than itself.

Now it is always on this principle that Christianity proceeds. It is never satisfied with a mere forbidding of evil, the mere ousting, under the action of fear or of any motive whatever, of an unclean spirit. It enjoins, it implants, it imposes positive good. It does not put the virtues it requires, in the form even of the decalogue—Thou shalt not kill—Thou shalt not steal—Thou shalt not covet. It puts it positively : Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. It never calculates for a moment on the heart being empty. If the love of sin goes out, the love of God comes in. If the love of the world is expelled, the love of a higher and better world is introduced. It furnishes what the affections may lay hold of, and attach themselves to, and work upon as vigorously as ever. If, when the unclean spirit goes out, the spirit of Christ comes in, He can keep good the house against its old tenant. Only when the house is empty can the evil spirit return, bringing seven worse and wicked spirits than himself to dwell there.

Take the case of a real conversion, the case of St. Paul. With all the honesty and conscientiousness to which he testified, as having always belonged to him, there were in him, who owned himself afterwards to have been a blasphemer, a persecutor and injurious, unclean spirits more

than one. There was the devil of Pharisaic pride and bigotry, the devil of intolerance, the devil of persecuting cruelty, setting him on a journey from Jerusalem to Damascus to harass and molest those, who agreed not with him and with his sect. When these evil spirits were expelled, as there shone around him a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, and he heard the remonstrance of the glorified Saviour, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" was his heart left empty and unoccupied? Was he thenceforth in a state of philosophic indifference, abstracted from anything in which the heart took interest, negatively good? No. In any man such state may not be counted on long. In that fiery nature it could not exist at all. The love of Christ took the place of those evil spirits that were sent to the dry places of the desert. And it became a passion. The whole soul was filled with it. And there was no room for the old occupants in that always noble, now humble and holy heart. They might wander in dry places for ever. There there was access for them never more.

And so it must be with thee, O man, who desirest to have some evil spirit go out of thee, and stay out of thee. It is not enough, in nowise is it enough, that thou dost put forth thine utmost strength for its expulsion. Reason, conscience, and God's word, commanding and threatening, all enjoin thee so to do. Thou mayest seem to be successful; yea, thou mayest succeed for a time. But if thou art content with the expulsion of an enemy, it will prove only a seeming and temporary success. Thou must introduce a friend. Thou must not leave thy heart empty. Thou must seek to have Christ live in thee by his Spirit. Thou must have the new affection to take the place of the old; the love of Christ, as it was in Paul, taking the place of the love of thy sin whatever it was; the desire to please Him taking the place of the desire to indulge it. Otherwise the old affection will revive in new strength. And conscience, beaten in the struggle, will present a less

formidable barrier to the introduction of new evils. Thy temporary escape from the domination of an evil passion will but place thee more at the mercy of it, and of others like it. That is no real, abiding or effectual change, in which the love of Christ takes not possession of the soul. Could such a change be permanent, it would not suffice for thy soul's present or future happiness. For whoso loveth not Christ is Anathema, Maranatha. But it will not even be permanent, such as it is, but lead rather to a state worse than the first. Look high then, and seek for high things, thou who art struggling with sin. Seek not only to be free from sin, but to become the servant of God. Seek not only to have the evil spirit expelled, but to have instead the indwelling of the good Spirit of God.

And there is one thing more which may be said. If not founded on what is taught in the passage before us, it is founded certainly on other Scriptures and on the lessons of experience. Hitherto I have dwelt on this, that to keep out an unclean spirit, we must have the heart occupied by a better spirit. The house must not be empty. Now I add, the new occupant must not be idle. The good affection must not be dormant. It must be active. It must have play and scope and gather size and strength by exercise, so as to fill the soul. It is the neglect of this, which often renders the preaching of God's word and other means of grace, so little effectual. Under some of these means, a good affection is excited in the heart, a movement at least towards the love of God or the love of man, say the latter of these two. A man says, and feels as he says it within himself: "The charity of the Gospel is a noble virtue, and that is no religion which fails to inspire it; and he is a noble being who acts under the influence of it; and earth would almost become a paradise again, if all were actuated by a principle so high and pure. Would that it were in me. Surely I do feel something of it. And I will, more than ever I have done heretofore, act upon it. I will not henceforth be so selfish and

selfseeking, so taken up with what concerns my own immediate interests, so indifferent to the condition and the interests of others. I will do some good. How can I be a follower of Christ, unless I make it a business to do good. It was His great business in the world. Surely it should be mine too, if I would count or call myself a disciple of His." Such thoughts have passed through some of our minds I have no doubt. And for a little, it might seem as if the old spirit were not only gone out, but a new one come in, to take its place and guard against its future intrusion. But the new spirit is not allowed to work. And if it has not exercise it will die, and the house of the heart be empty again, swept and garnished for the reception of its old occupant and seven others worse and more wicked. Say that this day week, some one, not become insensible to noble motives, not insensible to the duties enjoined in the Gospel and the high motives which it urges to the performance of them, had some such thoughts, formed some such purposes, as those I have expressed; and that now he were called to account, or called himself to account for the week's performance of the Sabbath's promise. What if all he could say was: "I have all the week sought as usual my own comfort. I have looked after and enjoyed my ordinary pleasures. I have minded my ordinary business. I have taken care that nobody wronged me. I have taken such measures as I could for future gain. But I cannot say I have sought to do good to anybody. I have relieved no one in distress. I have comforted no one in sorrow. I have encouraged no one in difficulty. I have taken no interest in any benevolent enterprise. I have exerted myself in no good work. I have simply in a variety of forms been minding myself." What sentiment of benevolence could stand this? Alas, the unclean spirit of selfishness has prevailed over it. It had a momentary admission into the heart; but the stronger principle resisted action, and smothered it. Be assured, a man cannot be truly benevolent and not act out his benevolence; any more than the heart can be empty of some occupants good or bad.

XVI.

DO MEN GROW BETTER AS THEY GROW OLDER.

PSALM XCII. 13, 14, 15.

Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age ; they shall be fat and flourishing ; to shew that the Lord is upright : he is my rock and there is no unrighteousness in him.

OCCASIONALLY, one hears a remark in common conversation, which though passed over at the time, remains in the mind and forms subject for much future and serious reflection ; and one such remark, coming from a man of sense, observation, and large experience of the world, impressed me not a little some short while ago. It was to this effect : " I am not of those who think men get better as they get older." And the question has often occurred to me since, is this really the case ? Is it the case, not universally, that of course it is not, but is it the case generally ? Is it the case so much as to make it the rule, instead of the exception, or the rule with comparatively few exceptions ? Nor was it easy to think seriously of such a remark, without giving a more immediately personal direction to the consideration of it, as I hope each of you may be inclined to follow me in doing, and saying " Is it the case with myself ? "

Take the remark as true, and it is the saddest possible view which can be taken of human life. The advance of age is necessarily accompanied with many mournful remembrancers of human frailty. The spirit and glow and vivid expectation of youth have passed away. The capacity and the relish for the exertions of active manhood are daily diminishing. There are sad blanks in the circle of family and friends. There are the ever increasing signs

and tokens of bodily decay, and nearer and plainer, day by day, appears the prospect of departure and dissolution ; all sad enough in themselves, if apart from views and considerations which can sustain and console amidst whatever in them is fitted to humble and to depress. But let there be added to the manifest and inevitable accompaniments of age, a growing departure from the acknowledged rule of right, a gradual weakening of moral principle, a decay of religious sensibility, a hardening of the heart against good impressions, a firmer resistance of charitable or holy impulses, a more quiet and tame submission to evil tempers and evil habits ; let in short the man be becoming morally worse instead of better ; what more deplorable subject of contemplation can be presented to the mind, on any view of the future, which includes the continued life and activity of the soul ? For take the view, that the soul on its departure from the body, goes without intervening interval, before God its Judge ; take the view, that it is called to account and must without fail enter on a state of retribution ; is it not, in the case supposed, becoming every day less fit to stand the issues of the judgment, less fit to enter on the reckoning to which it is to be brought ; that it is accumulating fresh sins to be visited with a more aggravated condemnation, in the words of the Apostle, “treasuring up to itself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God ?” Or take the view, that the soul does simply live on, there being in the new region in which it finds its appointed dwelling, no more immediate intervention of a Divine voice to pronounce, or of a Divine hand to execute judgment, than there appears now, in the settled order which pervades the universe, the law of Heaven being left to work out in each of the moral creatures of God the destined reward or punishment ; is not such soul becoming daily more a slave to passions, principles, habits, the existence and reign of which, from their very nature and

according to the constitution of things in which we are placed, must inevitably ensure its future wretchedness. It is not possible, be it observed, to stand still morally ; to keep the same position, in respect of the power and prevalence of moral and religious principle. If that principle is dominant, it does also advance in strength, and becomes more inaccessible to the force of evil influences. If that principle is disregarded, it becomes weaker, and yields more readily to temptation. If men as they are getting older are not also getting better, they are getting worse. And what more deplorable view of mankind can be taken or suggested, than that life, which should give wisdom and has had experience of the vanity of the world and the deceitfulness of sin, brings not amendment with it, and presents a spectacle of moral deterioration, rather than of moral improvement.

But is it so, or if it is to some extent so, need it be so ? These are matters for us now to enquire a little into. Now, as to its being so, with the mass of men, not taking into consideration, for the present, those who are or claim to be specially under the influence of Christian principle, but considering men, as men are generally to be found, with no more Christianity than the world is satisfied that men should have and perhaps requires them to have, there is something to be said on both sides. For suppose one to take the side that men as they grow older grow better, he might point in a multitude of cases to fopperies and follies which had been laid aside ; he might point to abstinence from sinful license, which had once been indulged in ; he might point to greater staidness and decorum of behaviour ; he might point to greater regularity in external religious observances ; he might point to activity in enterprises by which society is benefitted ; and, bidding you compare the settled and respectable member of society with the youth through which he had passed, he would perhaps triumphantly claim that a great moral improve-

ment had been effected. Or suppose one to take the other side, and hold that men do not get better, that they get worse as they get older, he might show how a certain tenderness of conscience, by which the youth had been distinguished, had gradually become blunted ; how the glow of virtuous resolution, which had once been so often and powerfully felt, had gradually cooled and passed away ; how the heart had become harder ; how the world's evil maxims were in speculation judged less severely, and practically more adopted ; how habits of selfish indulgence had been acquired ; and how the man had sunk down to the level of the prevailing morals of the community, and sought less and less from day to day to rise to that higher standard, to which the lessons and the aspirations of his youth had tended. No doubt, if such statements were made, there would be a certain amount of truth in both of them. That there is the outward and visible improvement which the one exhibits, and on which he founds his conclusion, and that in multitudes of cases, is what we all know to be true. And that there is the real depravation which the other exhibits, is what the general conscience, and the general observation, and the general experience, will also testify. To what conclusion then does the argument tend ? Not I apprehend to the favorable view of human nature. For the improvement, in the one case, is more seeming than real, and the deterioration, in the other, is not seeming but real. Suppose, as is no doubt the case in multitudes of persons, the improvement and the falling off to be both exemplified in the same individual, the improvement necessarily indicates nothing more than that certain passions are worn out, and that, released from their thralldom, there is a more decorous submission to the proprieties and decencies which the world requires ; while the other involves a falling off in extent and earnestness of virtuous purpose, in the sensitiveness of conscience, and the power of moral principle. The man who judges

favourably looks on the surface of things and is pleased with the fair show which it exhibits. The man who takes the other side judges unfavourably, because he looks deeper into the heart and sees more of its evil and deceitfulness.

I fear, that apart from the existence and actual reign of Christian principle in men, the unfavourable view must be taken, even that very sad view which we set out with contemplating. Where Christianity does not reign among us to whom it has been revealed and published, it has been defied. It has been with the knowledge of what it says, what it inculcates, what it promises, that it has been slighted. There has been a conviction of the reasonableness of its claims, and a resistance of them not the less—conviction often and often felt, but as often resisted and dismissed. And this cannot be done without a moral depravation, a weakening generally of the power of conscience. The result of which is that at a later period of life, a man who has so acted in respect of religious convictions, will do things, and begin and hold on in courses which at an earlier period of life he would have been incapable of, and would have resented the imputation of being capable of, with some such feeling as Hazael expressed, when he said: "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" While often the improvement which seems to take place is only the exchange of one evil passion or one evil habit for another; avarice for example taking the place of sensuality; an insensate love of money, without reference, or with but little reference to its uses and responsibilities, assuming the lead in the soul instead of the pursuits of pleasure or ambition.

I desire this day to speak to the consciences of all. And first I desire to speak to the consciences of those who know and acknowledge to themselves that they are not Christians in the true and high sense of the word, having never received the love of the truth into their hearts; who cannot so impose on themselves as to believe that

they are ; who know very well, that judged by the Christian standard of faith and practice, they are in a state of condemnation ; and who, perhaps for this very reason, abstain from making more of a Christian profession than can be avoided. Are there not such here ? Are there not who feel that they are such ? Are there not who are now acknowledging to themselves that they are such ? And if such there are, known or unknown, with them we have to do ; our ministry is to them as well as to others, perhaps specially to them rather than to others. We have to warn them, to exhort them, to entreat them. We have as knowing the terror of the Lord, to persuade them. We have as knowing the tender mercy of our God, to win them to repentance.

And now, to such we have to say, how is it your consciences testify in regard of the question which has been under consideration ? Do they say, do they allow you to say, that you are nearer to becoming Christians than you were ten or twenty years ago ? Or do they constrain you to acknowledge that you are further from it than ever ; that your hearts are less moved by, and less susceptible of, religious influences ; that like the ungodly Jews, of whom the prophet Zephaniah speaks, you are settled on your lees, and disposed to let the dregs of life be spent, as all the rest of it has been spent, not in the fear or love of God, but in the love and indulgence of self, and self it may be, in its lowest and least worthy form. It is very possible that such may be the sad and desponding testimony of some, and it is very possible, that nothing that any man can say shall be able to effect a change. Nay, it is very certain, that without the grace accompanying the truth of God and giving it power and efficacy, no change will ever take place. And that grace may not be vouchsafed. It may have been so often rejected that it will no more be offered. The Spirit may have been so done despite unto, that it will not again return. And if the human eye could

look on the soul and discern its symptoms, as it can look on and discern the symptoms of the body in its disease and decay, there might be perceived the tokens of spiritual disease which no healing influence shall ever remedy or remove. But such is not the case when the heart is yet agitated with religious emotion ; when conscience is awake and bearing true testimony ; when the truth of God is acting according to its proper nature ; when there is fear of sin, and fear of the wrath of God, and fear of being shut out from His presence ; when there is the desire of God's favour, and an inward conviction that such favour is life and better than life. Then there is token of the Spirit's presence, and His help may be expected. And if there be who are so moved now, let them be entreated to submit to the gracious influence, and inwardly and heartily, as soon too as may be, openly and publicly, give themselves to God and to His service. Let this very day, this very hour, nay, this very moment, be the turning point in their history, the beginning in them of a new life, not to degenerate like the former, but to advance like the dawn of the morning to the resplendence of the perfect day. Would that there were even one so influenced and moved. But why say one, why not say many, why not say *all* who stand in need of change ? Has the Gospel lost its power ? Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened ? Has judgment no terrors ? Has the love of Christ no efficacy on the sinful soul ? Have His words of tender invitation no force to draw the heavy laden to Him. God of mercy ! Rend thy heavens and come down, and work in each and all of us to will and do of Thy good pleasure

But hitherto we have been speaking of and to men not claiming to be specially under the power of Christian principle. Now let us consider, how it is as respects progress for good or for evil with those, in whom it may be hoped and believed that there is genuine Christian principle. I am afraid that even in their case, there might be

argument as before, and with some show of truth and reason on both sides. For let us suppose one to take the side, that Christians as they grow older, do *not* grow better ; he could point to the less vivid emotion produced by religious truth, in the aged as compared with the young believer, and the comparative absence of enthusiasm in the work of faith and labour of love, although the work and the labour might not be neglected. He would bid you compare the promise of the first sense and assurance of God's love in the soul, with the ultimate performance, and bid you mark how deplorably short the performance comes. He would point to outbreaks of evil, of which at the first commencement of the spiritual life there were no traces to be found. He would bid you listen to confessions of frequent backsliding, and of long intervals in which religious principle seemed to be dormant, if it existed at all in the soul ; confession of sin, confession of shortcoming in obedience to God's law, more full, and more humble, than in the glow of a new sprung devotion, were felt to be called for or thought of, as if they would ever be needed. And he might ask, with some measure of triumph in his argument, however sadly the gist of it might tell against Christian steadfastness and Christian progress, Is it of such it can be said, that their last love is greater than the first ; that they are ever following on to know the Lord ; or that they are like the morning light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day ? And take one again on the other side, who holds of Christian people, that they do get better as they become older, he might point to the greater strength and steadfastness, which by long exercise, moral principle and religious principle have acquired in the aged as compared with the young believer ; he might point to the stability of virtuous habit, as making up, for the diminished vividness of religious emotion and for the warmth of a newly created enthusiasm, He might point to the mellowing influence of Christian

principle on the temper; to sound views on the power of the world to satisfy the wants of the soul and fill up the measure of its aspirations and desires, which are gradually entertained with more of clearness and consistency; and to the more abundant exercise of that Christian charity "which thinketh no evil, which rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, which beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things." He would account for the growing depth and solemnity of the soul's acknowledgments of sin, by its very progress in the divine life, its growing apprehension of the extent of the duty which God requires, and the increasing sensitiveness of the conscience to what is evil. And he would hold, that even in such confessions, and in the prayers and pains to which they would lead, in the resisting of evil and doing good, there was token of advancement and of growing meetness for a heavenly life. Nor would there be wanting truth in either representation. Undoubtedly the aged Christian comes not up to what in the fervour of his first love he had promised, and there seems a superiority, in the greater warmth and zeal and life of the young believer. But the superiority is more seeming than real. The vividness of emotion is not to be compared in value with the strength of principle and stability of habit, in the old and advanced Christian. It is to lead to, and by exercise to produce, such strength of principle and stability of habit in what is morally true, and lovely, and honourable, and of good report, that the vividness of emotion in regard of religious truth is given. That is its purpose, and when that purpose is served it becomes less necessary. Where true Christian principle is in a man, he *does*, in all that is essential, grow better as he grows older. That principle is like the leaven in the parable. Lodge it in a man, and it gradually but surely subordinates all within him to its influence. It makes him more humble, more thankful to God, more charitable to men. It assimilates

his temper, his disposition, his whole life, more and more to the temper and dispositions which prevail in the world above, to which he aspires and to which he is advancing. He is less engrossed with the world. He thinks more of God. He meditates more on the mission work and love of Christ. The Bible is oftener in his hands, and he seeks more to have communion with God in prayer and supplication. Nor is it only with the commandments of the first table of the law that he concerns himself. The law of love to men stands connected with the law of love to God, in his apprehension and in his practice, even as they stand connected in the sum of human duty which is given in the Scriptures. His is the feeling of the Apostle, when he said to the Philippians : " Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect : but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Certainly there should be such a state of feeling, such a state of progress. There is no reason why there should not be. All needful help is promised, and there is at all times access to the throne of grace. God is willing to supply the wants of the believer ; and Christ says to each soul that truly seeks His aid, as He did to St. Paul : " My grace is sufficient for thee, my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Is there then such state of feeling and of progress amongst those of us who make a Christian profession. Desiring to speak this day to the consciences of all, I do now desire to speak to the consciences of such. I would put them on enquiry whether or not they are thus affected, thus advancing in the divine life ; and I would have them to question, and to doubt, the reality of a principle of Christian life in them at all, if it is not so influencing them. What is, or can be, that Christianity worth, which does not make a man better, better in regard of duty both to God

and man? What can that Christianity be worth which lets a man grow worse, less spiritual, less holy, less heavenly-minded, as he is drawing nearer to the grave and the judgment? Must not the Christianity which is to take a man to heaven inspire into him heavenly tempers and dispositions? And must it not so inspire him the more as he is advancing nearer to heaven? Hear what David said of old in the text: "Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the Courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing; to shew that the Lord is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him." "That is," says Matthew Henry in his commentary, First, "They shall grow. Where God gives grace He will give more grace. Second, They shall flourish in the credit of their profession, and in the joy of their own souls. Third, They shall be fruitful, bringing forth the instances of a lively devotion, and useful conversation by which God is glorified and others edified. The last days of the saints are sometimes their best days; their last work their best work, and all because, of God's promise, whom all who trust in find faithful and all-sufficient."

In conclusion, while urging self-examination, I would say, See that it be self-examination, not examination of others, whether they are becoming better or not, bringing forth fruit or not. It is a device of the devil to make people search into the character of others, when they should be scrutinizing their own. Let not any one say, Is my neighbour becoming better or becoming worse, as he becomes older? but let each say, giving to the whole of this discussion the practical and personal direction which was suggested at the outset, Am I becoming better or worse myself? This is what each is concerned to know, and no idle speculation about others should turn away his attention, in this respect, from his own case. Happy they, whose abiding sense of God's love and animating hope

of future glory is ever urging and ever enabling to have their life and conversation as becometh the Gospel, making the enquiry easy whether they be in Christ, and Christ in them; warranting the appeal from each, "Lord thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee," and the positive declaration, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant: thou hast loosed my bonds." Yea, and happy they too, who having learned the truth concerning themselves, though it be sad truth and mortifying truth, are moved thereby, in penitence and faith, to betake themselves to Him, who hath said of His people, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely."

XVII.
COMPARATIVE DANGER OF POVERTY AND
RICHES.

PHILIPPIANS IV, 12.

I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere, and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

It is a bold declaration which the Apostle makes in the text, and there are few indeed who durst venture to make it, with the same confidence. "I know, I am prepared," such is the import of the declaration, "I know, I am prepared to act and feel aright, in either extreme, in which the allotments of Providence may place me, in affluence, or in poverty." From any ordinary person, we would be inclined to receive a speech like this with some degree of doubt and distrust. It implies so much; it involves so great a proficiency in Christian virtue. It lays claims to so much both of moral discernment and of stable principle. From St. Paul however, we may receive it without hesitation, as expressing not merely his own conviction, but the actual truth. And that, not only, because in speaking of himself, as well as when he speaks of other persons or of other things, he speaks under the immediate guidance of the Spirit of God, but also from the terms which he uses in regard of this high Christian attainment, and from which it appears, that he laid no claim to personal merit on account of it. Whatever of wisdom it implied, he ascribed to the teaching of God. Whatever of moral strength or steadfastness it implied, he ascribed to the grace of Christ. "I have learned," he says "in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content. I have been instructed both to be full and to be hungry. I can do all things, through

Christ which strengtheneth me." And moreover, the vicissitudes of St. Paul's life had put his Christian principles to the test, and had enabled him to speak of them from actual experience of their power.

It is, however, to the attainment itself that I would now call your attention, not to the evidence there is that St. Paul had reached it. Consider again, I beseech you, how great is that attainment—knowledge and strength both to judge and act aright, to judge and to act according to the high and holy principles of the Gospel, either in the state of prosperity, or of adversity, in affluence, or in poverty. In either of those states, and arising out of the peculiarities of them, there are powerful adversaries to the exercise and the reign of right principle in the soul. In either state, there are formidable obstacles to entering in at the strait gate, and travelling in the narrow way which leadeth unto life. In either state, there are temptations, powerful in too many cases, to blind men to the path of duty, to lead them aside from that path, even when they know it, and to render them indifferent about returning to it and persevering in it. So many are those adversaries, so formidable those obstacles, so strong and numerous those temptations, that it is difficult to tell which state is the more dangerous of the two. In the book of Proverbs, there has been a prayer recorded, which expresses equal apprehension of both. "Give me neither poverty nor riches ; feed me with food convenient for me : Lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord ? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." And truly, though strong things are oftener said in the Scriptures, and especially by our Lord himself, concerning the danger of riches, than concerning the danger of poverty, to right and holy principle, this does probably arise, less from the greater danger of riches, than from the greater inclination of men to expose themselves to that danger, rendering admonition and remon-

strance in regard of it more necessary. Experience puts them, very much as Agur's prayer puts them, on a level. Yet, through the grace of Christ, was the Apostle able in both states to comport himself as a Christian man; in each of them maintaining an even and contented mind, and a pure and heavenly conversation. "I know," he says, "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere, and in all things, I am instructed both to abound and to suffer need."

Now, I wish to speak to you for a little of these two kinds of danger—danger arising from two different conditions, in one or other of which we are or we may, by the dispensations of Providence, be placed. Think however, a little before we go further, of the two states themselves from which the danger arises, danger to the existence and the vigorous exercise of holy principle. These we call the state of poverty, and the state of riches, rightly enough, scripturally enough. They are so called in Agur's prayer which I have already quoted to you. But we must take care while we use right words, and scriptural words, that we attach to them right and scriptural ideas—the ideas, which in the Scriptures they are used to express. Poverty and riches are words having with different persons very different significations. The man who is accounted poor by one class is accounted rich by another. I daresay there are many of us who have no idea of calling or accounting ourselves rich, to whom nevertheless, there are multitudes looking up, as to rich people. And others, I doubt not, from the possession of an amount of wealth, which falls but to the lot of few, are looking down on some as poor, who do not by any means class or consider themselves among the poor. But the point is not what a man thinks of his own worldly circumstances, or what another thinks of them. The point of importance—in considering Scripture declarations concerning the rich and the poor, is to whom the Scriptures themselves apply these epithets,

and who are to apply to themselves individually, the admonitions and warnings, which are addressed in the Scriptures to each of those classes.

Now, I apprehend that the state of poverty, according to Scripture views of it, is described in the text. The expressions of the Apostle define and describe it—"to be abased, to be hungry, to suffer need." It is not the state of the labourer or the mechanic, who by his industry and exertion, is able to procure for himself and for those depending on him, the food and clothing and shelter which are necessary for the wants of the body. That is no state of abasement. That is a state of honorable exertion. That is the state in which God has so ordered it, that the great proportion of mankind must ever be. That is the state which the Son of God dignified and ennobled, by living in it Himself, during the greater portion of that time in which He dwelt upon the earth. Neither is the state of poverty, according to Scripture views of it, the state of men who are pinched and wretched, because they have not wherewith to obtain for themselves this or that luxury, this or that expensive indulgence of the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, or the pride of life, which they have set their hearts on, or to which they have become accustomed from the habits of society in which they move. The Apostle's words 'need' and 'hunger' point expressly to things of absolute necessity—the food which nourishes the body, the raiment that clothes it, the house that shelters it from the elements; the things in short that are necessary to prolonged life, activity and usefulness. He is poor, in the Scripture sense and in the Apostle's sense, and in the sense implying imminent danger to holy principle and to a holy life, who has not these, or who has them not to the extent that is necessary; who is unable by his own independent exertions to obtain them; who is constrained to look to others for support, and 'abased to seek it at their hands, or else be in daily 'need' of all

that is required for the comfort, and of almost all that is required, for the very preservation and life of the body. This is the state of poverty to be dreaded as dangerous, almost if not altogether as dangerous to a right state of mind in regard of religion, as the state of riches. This is the state in which multitudes are placed, partly of necessity, arising out of the arrangements of that artificial state of society in which we live, often no doubt in consequence of direct and unavoidable dispensations of the Divine Providence, and oftener still, in consequence of their own vice and misconduct. This is the state of which St. Paul could say, after frequent and personal experience of it, that he was prepared for it, and knew how to guide and govern himself in it, according to the dictates of Christian principle.

Then again as to the state of riches, the Apostle's words do I think give the key to that also,—what it is, which according to the Scriptures, we are to understand by it. He speaks of 'abounding,' and 'being full;' of abundance and fulness, in contradistinction, to 'being hungry,' and 'suffering need,' abundance and fulness therefore, in regard of things necessary for the body. Such abundance and fulness both in regard of the real necessities of life, and in regard of the *feeling* of wealth, because of the ample possession of these, may exist and do exist, amidst ten thousand varying degrees of worldly possessions. They may and they do exist in all the various grades, into which society is divided. We are not to look for 'the rich' those, that is, to whom the term as used in the Scriptures applies, to the highest classes of society only, or to individuals in possession of large pecuniary means. We are to look to this abundance, this fulness, wherever it exists, and in whomsoever it exists. The state of riches is not therefore so uncommon as many would have it to be; nor are the warnings and admonitions of the Scriptures, in regard of that state, so limited in the range of their application as some would have them. It is the

simple and natural idea of riches which the Scriptures contemplate, not the special and factitious idea, that may be attached to the term, in an artificial state of society or by a grasping, and ambitious and covetous temper of mind. The state of hunger and of fulness, the state of need and of abundance, these are what the Apostle places in contrast; these are the states of danger to holy principle—danger of different kinds, yet equally perhaps to be dreaded; these are the states in which it requires so much of the grace of God, and so much advancement in the divine life, to be able to say with the Apostle, “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound; everywhere and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.”

But what, it may be said, what is there in the state of poverty, even such as you define it, which is so very adverse to holy principle, and which renders the vigorous exercise of such principle in that state, so signal a proof of the divine grace in the soul. It is a grievous state no doubt. It is a painful state. It is a state, of sad privations. It is a state calling for commiseration and for aid. But wherein is it a state of danger, such as you represent it to be?

Any one may find an answer to this question, who will make himself personally familiar with the condition and the privations of the poor, in the sense in which we now understand the word. Let him look, with his own eyes, on whole families crowded together in one room, amidst the squalor and the riot of which there can neither be bodily comfort nor mental quiet. Let him note the gradual degradation of intellect and feeling, which incessant and grinding poverty tends almost inevitably to produce; and how the appetites and instincts of nature, plead with a voice that can hardly be resisted, that the nearest way be taken for their indulgence. Let him consider whether it can be easy to keep fast hold, either of moral principle or religious truth, amidst the

cries and pains of a family perishing with cold and hunger, and only subsisting on a scanty and precarious charity. Is there not temptation in such circumstances, to resort to the easily spoken falsehood which a careless world requires, in order to be induced to part with some of that superfluous abundance which the miserable petitioner stands so much in need of? Is there not temptation to put forth an unobserved hand to the unlawful attainment of what is so little to its possessor, and would be so much to him who is in want? Is there not temptation to obtain through means of an intoxication, which ultimately aggravates the ever pressing evils under which the poor sufferer is groaning, a temporary forgetfulness of those evils? Is it possible almost in such circumstances, to be devoted to the duties and exercises of prayer, and meditation, and reading of God's word, which are essential to the life and vigour of religious principle in the soul? Will not hard thoughts too readily suggest themselves of God himself, and his eternal Providence? Who would not pray to be preserved, if it were God's will, from so fierce and fiery a trial, as religious faith and moral principle are subjected to in such a state? Who does not feel, that in such circumstances to keep by the holy principles and the holy practice of the Christian, to cleave to the word and ordinances of God, to live by faith, to keep a conscience void of offence towards God and man, to walk at once humbly, and holily, and trustfully, and submissively with God, is really, and should be considered, a manifestation of principle as strong and of grace as abundant, as ever appeared in the martyrs or confessors of primitive times? In such circumstances too, when religious principle does not exist, it is a hard and difficult enterprise on which he is set, whose work is to inculcate and to implant it. There is difficulty in getting even a hearing for what he has to say, and still more for that patient consideration of the truth, without which it can neither be apprehended

by the mind nor produce any impression on the heart. Assuredly, even in the state which we have described, religion has unspeakable consolations to impart ; and in all reason it should be regarded and its consolations sought after. But, oh, is there not in the state itself, its privations and temptations, acting along with the ungodliness that is natural to all human hearts, a most grievous and almost insuperable, nay, except by God's special grace, an insuperable obstacle, to its being so regarded, or to the experience of its power and preciousness ?

Why do we say these things ? Why do we bring them before you ? It is in the first place, that they may give us a lesson of thankfulness—thankfulness to God, who has placed us in more favorable circumstances, who has not called us to the endurance of such grievous trial of principle as the state we have described implies ; but, feeding us with food convenient for us, is giving us opportunity to serve Him with gladness of heart, and to occupy ourselves with the consideration of that precious truth, which when received with the obedience of faith sanctifies and saves the soul. It is in the second place, that they may give us a lesson of compassion, deep and tender compassion, for those who are in a state so wretched ; all the more wretched, and the more calling for commiseration, if it is by their own guilt and folly they have fallen into it. For such guilt and folly furnish new elements, and these the greatest, both of present misery and of danger for the future. It is in the third place, that they may suggest to us a lesson of charity,—charity in judging and charity in acting ; charity in judging, not harshly to reckon up the vices of the wretched poor, their falsehood, their intemperance, their dishonesty, their disregard of things sacred, without taking into account the grievous temptations to all these, to which they are subject ; not to think of ourselves as beings of a different make or mould, because having never suffered under their temptations, we have never fallen into their

sins ; and charity in acting, not merely to pity such cases, and to give an immediate benefaction, but, as we have opportunity, to endeavour to bring people out of circumstances so unhappy and dangerous, rather than merely to keep them alive in them ; to use every means to incline and enable them by independent exertion, to rise to a safer state, as well as a more comfortable and more honourable,—safer as respects society, and safer as respects themselves, their moral principles, their religious faith, their eternal salvation. In this respect, he who regards only the economical well-being of society, and he who looks only to the moral reform of society, as for example its deliverance from the vice of intemperance, and he, who with Christian wisdom, zeal, and love, contemplates in addition to both and as unspeakably transcending both, the good, in the highest sense, of immortal souls,—their being redeemed to God and restored to his favour, and renewed after his image—should *all* act together ; each endeavouring to improve the temporal condition of the poor, and to place them in some measure beyond the reach of temptations, which prove so fatal, and which with any knowledge of ourselves, or of human nature generally, we cannot reasonably wonder, prove so fatal, as being so far the most rational way, to procure the attainment of the ends which they have severally in view. Finally, we bring forward those things as suggesting a lesson of prudence,—prudence, to those whose state is such, that by a little less of industry, a little yielding to indolence, or to intemperance, they would speedily fall into it. Surely it should put them to exertion, and self-restraint, and self-denial, to consider not only the physical misery, but also the moral and spiritual danger, danger not respecting time only but also eternity, to which they would so expose themselves, and those connected with and dear to them. It is, we uphold it, as sacredly binding a duty on a man, to avoid such circumstances by all fair and honourable means, as it is to act

rightly in them, when they cannot be avoided. There is a divine command to the Christian, to enter not into temptation, as well as to resist it when it comes; yea, and we may extend the lesson of prudence farther, making it have respect to spiritual as well as temporal provision, and applying it to all. No man is sure of continued prosperity. Riches take to themselves wings and flee away. We daily witness and hear of remarkable vicissitudes in the history and fortunes of individuals. We have more than once seen in our own city, how thousands may rise in comfort, and in the enjoyment of abundance in the morning, and before night be in destitution and misery. Is it not then the dictate of Christian wisdom, since we are so weak in ourselves, and the tenure so uncertain by which all we have here is held, to seek the establishment within our souls of that holy principle, which alone can stand and enable us to stand, such changes as may be in store for us, and so to be built up in the faith of Christ, and so to be partakers of the consolations of Christ, that we should be able to say with the Apostle in the text, "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."

I have dwelt so long on the dangers of the one state, that I can but shortly advert for the present to those of the other—the state of fulness, the state of abundance. These however are obvious enough. There is the danger of overweening pride, there is the danger of being engrossed and satisfied with worldly things, the danger of ceasing to look beyond them for happiness, the danger of idolizing them and thinking that because they can do much, they can do all which man stands in need to have done for him; the danger of setting the heart on them, the danger of ever increasing desire after a larger share of them, the danger of the total occupation of the mind about them—this latter is perhaps the greatest of all—the entire devotion

of all mental energies to the sole object of increasing or enjoying wealth. And it is remarkable how near akin it is to the greatest danger of the state of need. In the one case, the spirit is incessantly occupied with making provision for the necessities of life. In the other, the spirit is incessantly occupied with making provision for worldly gratification, either after a quiet and regular, or a more gay and extravagant fashion. In both, God is excluded from the mind. There is not time or inclination to think of Him, or to allow the thought of Him to influence the affections. The result spiritually is the same, the same in the habits of ungodliness which it produces, the same in the misery to which such ungodliness must of necessity lead. It is because of the danger of such result, it was because of the strength of the temptations to the disposition and the conduct which lead to such result, that our Saviour has so solemnly said that it is easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

And how shall this danger be met, be avoided, be counteracted? by prayer? by reading the Word of God? by waiting on religious ordinances? by the exercises of devotion to which Christians are called? I tell you, not by any or by all of these together, while keeping fast hold of the earthly mammon and refusing to share it with others who are in need; while willing to lay it out only on ourselves or on the members of our family, whom we count but as a part of ourselves; while willing to spend it only in luxurious feasts, or costly furniture, or extravagant dress, or else accumulating it, for we know not whom, who shall do with it we know not what. While holding it fast, no one of those religious exercises, nor all of them together, will disarm it of its power to ensnare and ruin us. We must part with it, when occasion requires to do good with it, or we must perish with it. I remember an old and excellent minister of the Church of Scotland, long gone

to his account, and I trust to his reward, telling me of his having been once consulted by an old, and in his situation in life a wealthy man, who deplored his own growing spirit of greed and worldliness, and wished to know how it might be repressed or removed ; and of his having admonished him to counteract that spirit, as he valued his eternal salvation, and always and especially by *giving*. It is by such giving, not merely with intention to do good, or with a vague hope that good will be done, but of course also with as much as possible of Christian wisdom, so that good shall not only be intended to be done but be really done, that we can, according to the admonition of our Lord "make to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness." It is only while willing and ready, according to the admonition of St. Paul, to do good, to distribute, to communicate, that the religious exercises which I have mentioned, can prove enlightening to the mind or sanctifying to the heart. There is a connection established by God and declared by Christ himself, between a right use of the good gifts of God's providence, and our receiving the higher and better gift of the Divine grace. "If ye have not been faithful," said our Lord, "in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another's, who shall give you that which is your own?" I have referred to the Saviour's admonition: "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness;" and I have indicated how the admonition is to be obeyed. It would be easy to tell, how you could most surely and effectually make foes of the same mammon. Keep it, cleave to it, hoard it up, refuse it to the widow and fatherless. Part with it for no cause, in which either the glory of God or the good of man is concerned. Part with it only, or almost only, for the indulgence of your own selves. Never part with it when you can decently keep it, decently in the eye of the world, except for the gratification of

pride, vanity, sensuality. And then in either case, so spending it or so keeping it, you may be assured, it shall prove your bitterest foe, and in the language of St. James the Apostle, "eat your flesh as if it were fire."

These remarks, it behoves each of us to apply to himself and to his own case. It is an old and common error to apply the lessons of the pulpit, not to ourselves but to our neighbours who may be sitting round us, and specially is it so, when the giving of money is concerned. Then it is, such a one might and should give with liberality—not I should give with liberality myself. It would be an easy matter indeed to proceed with any public or charitable enterprise, had people the right to fix the amount of liberality with which others were to give, instead of the amount of liberality with which they were to give themselves. There would be no difficulty then, either in building churches or in maintaining the poor. I entreat you, to leave off the wholly unprofitable employment of thus judging for others. I call you to the work in hand, the work of judging, according to Christian principle and Christian feeling for yourselves, ever bearing in mind that it is by wise schemes and generous giving to relieve and raise the condition of the poor, that the special spiritual danger of riches can be most effectually overcome.

XVIII.

THE IMMUTABILITY OF THE DIVINE WORD.

ISAIAH XL., 6, 7, 8.

The voice said, Cry. And he said, what shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.

IT is not to the frailty of man, so affectingly set forth in these words of the Prophet that I desire in the first instance to call your attention, but rather to the immutable and enduring word, which is here put in contrast with that frailty. And here let it be observed, in what sense I take the expression, "word of God," I understand by it an expression of the will of God. It is probable that the Prophet in using it had some special, and as it would seem, gracious expression of the divine will in view. And it is certain that the Apostle Peter, quoting in his first Epistle the language of the Prophet, applies it to the Gospel. "This," says he, "is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you." But the text holds true in the general as well as in the restricted sense, with reference to every expression of the divine will, as well as to any special expression of that will. The word of God is a law, and a law, which for the time He wills it to continue in operation, nothing can alter, nothing modify, nothing supersede or turn aside. Heaven and earth may pass away. But the word of God cannot pass away. It must stand. It must prove faithful. It must have a sure and infallible efficacy.

So it appears to us all, in regard of those natural laws which God has impressed on the material universe,

It is from "a word of God," an expression of his will, that all these laws take their origin and have their efficacy ; such a word as God spoke in the beginning, when He said, "Let there be light, and there was light." It is because the word of our God doth stand for ever, that these laws are all so stable and immutable. Therefore it is, that in all that concerns this world in which we dwell, we are able to calculate with such unfailing certainty, on the permanence of that order which has been established, and on the production of like results by like causes. Therefore it is, that in the immensity of space, the glorious orbs of heaven move with a regularity which nothing can hinder nor disturb. So we find it written in the devout acknowledgment of the Psalmist : "For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations : Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth. They continue this day according to thine ordinances : for all are thy servants."

There can be no possible doubt, of the beneficent design of all these laws, to which a "word of God" has given being, and efficacy, and permanence. The general result of them, in so far as we are capable of knowing and judging of it, is greatly beneficial. And there is abundant reason to believe, that if our knowledge of their operation and their results were more extensive and perfect, we should have our convictions confirmed and deepened of their benevolent purpose and their beneficial tendency. Yet it is to be observed, the direct and immediate operation of them is not always what we should call beneficial. Often that operation leads to consequences the most painful and agonizing. It is according to established laws, laws established by a "word of God," that the touch or the breath of a fever patient communicates disease and death to others, to others, it may be, who are kindly ministering to his bodily or spiritual wants. It is according to established laws, that the mountain side, loosened from the place

which it has occupied for ages, overwhelms in its resistless course the families which have been living in peaceful security below. It is according to established laws, that the fierce element of fire proves so often, in regard both of man's property and life, so terrible a destroyer. It is according to established laws, that the winds and waves have so many victims, and that so many gallant and loving hearts sleep in the depths of the ocean. In the sweeping operation of these general laws, individual suffering, is as it were, disregarded. Young and old, rich and poor, the gentle and loving as well as the selfish and hard-hearted, those who are beginning a career of usefulness and activity, as well as those who have run that course, the son and stay of a widowed mother, as well as the man who stands alone in the world without any to cleave to him or to depend on him, all suffer alike under the operation of the natural laws which God has established. These having their force and efficacy in the "word of God which standeth for ever" are in no wise affected in their operation by the calamity falling upon such, or on others through them. It is while witnessing such calamities in the case of others, or while suffering under them ourselves, we receive perhaps the deepest impression of the enduring and immutable nature of the word of God, and of the laws which it expresses, and the utter weakness also, and inefficiency of man's will or wishes, when brought into opposition to them. Truly in such seasons of mourning and misery, the frailty of man stands in contrast, as in the text, with the immutable counsel of God; the weakness of man, with the resistless potency of those laws which God has established. And though in different circumstances from those of the Prophet, and with a far different application from that which he made, there naturally rises to our lips the same solemn acknowledgment which the text contains: "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field. The grass

withereth, the flower fadeth ; but the word of our God shall stand for ever."

We make one good use of the impression, often the very strong and solemnizing impression, which in such circumstances we receive of the unswerving operation of these physical laws, according to which, as standing in the word of God, the universe is governed, when we transfer the impression so received, to the nature and operation of those moral laws, which are equally of divine appointment, and which, we are expressly taught, are as unchangeable in their nature and efficacy. These laws, in as far as we are at present concerned to consider them, are of two kinds ; the one relating to the ruin caused by sin, the other relating to the method of recovery from that ruin. In reference to each of these, equally as in reference to any physical law, it behoves us to take into account the saying of the text, that "the word of God shall stand for ever."

We have in Scripture and in experience abundant demonstration of this as respects the first of these classes of moral laws, those, namely, which relate to the consequences of sin. A word of God connected sin and death. "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." The great deceiver endeavored early to instil doubts into the minds of our first parents, as to whether such a constitution of things did really exist. "Ye shall not," said he, "ye shall not surely die." But who can entertain such doubts now? Has not that word of God stood—stood unrevoked, through the long ages of the world's history? And is it not still standing? Who can form any adequate idea of the amount of pain and suffering produced under this constitution of things? Yet has any contemplation of the consequences, or any experience of the consequences that follow in the working of it, availed to set it aside? Is it not the truth which the Apostle has stated to us in his Epistle to the Romans: "By one

man sin entered into the world, and death by sin ; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." From age to age that saying has been verified : "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." And every instance of death that presents itself to us, in whatever form it may appear, is fresh proof, not only of the first part of our text, that "all flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field," but of the latter part of it too, "that the word of our God shall stand for ever."

It is thus with all the moral laws of the divine government. They have an abiding force and efficacy, which no one can ever hope to escape or to elude. That which the word of God connects with shame and misery does ever stand so connected. The suffering, which is the result of such appointment, stands not at all in the way of its steady, unvarying, unflinching execution. And what we see, and know, and feel of this immutable action of the word of God, should lead us confidently to expect the same immutability in regard to all that is to come. If there be a word of God connecting future misery with impenitence and unbelief ; what is there in all our experience of the working of the divine laws, what in all our experience of the stability of the divine determinations, to encourage the hope, far less to warrant the conviction, that such word shall be altered or repealed ? Certainly it is not the purpose, the ultimate purpose, of the word or of the will of God to produce suffering. Nay, it is the very reverse. It is its purpose to prevent suffering ; to prevent it to the greatest extent that it is possible to prevent it. Yet is not that word or will to be turned aside, because leading to suffering ? So it may be with the purposes of man, who is as grass, and his goodliness as the flower of the field ; but so it is not, with the purposes of God who changeth not. The physical laws which He has appointed act with unvarying regularity. So do the laws of his moral administration. In either case we must conform

to them, or suffer by them. If we voluntarily, or involuntarily, come into collision with the former, if we place ourselves in opposition to the latter, *we* must yield, not *they*; *we* must suffer, not *they* be in aught infringed. In regard of both, it holds alike true, that "the word of our God shall stand for ever."

How vain then for us to disobey a law of God, and to go on from day to day in such disobedience, and yet to expect, that in our particular case the sanctions of that law shall not take effect. How vain for us, in defiance of all we see and experience of the rigid determinations of the divine will, to expect an interference in our behalf, that shall in our case separate sin from its ordinary consequences, and give to us the indulgence and practice of the one, without the ruin and misery of the other. We may speak of the mercy of God. And true it is the tongue of man or angel cannot enough commend the mercy of God, nor can any one measure its length, and breadth, and height, and depth. But His is a mercy which is manifested in the establishment of laws, not in the disregard of them; in the original nature and steadfast execution of these laws, not in the occasionally setting them aside for the answering of a temporary purpose, or to prevent an incidental evil. Often it might seem to the apprehensions of men a befitting time and occasion, for the exercise of such mercy as should set aside the physical laws which God has established, when the operation of such laws is carrying desolation and distress into unnumbered families, or hurrying souls without warning into eternity. But to the mind of God it seems not so; and neither, though to man's limited and imperfect apprehension, it might appear befitting that the divine mercy should interfere to prevent the established consequences of a moral law, when that law carried into execution is producing suffering—neither in that case, does God so judge. In neither case are the counsels of heaven so flexible to the wishes of man, In

regard of both it holds true, "the word of our God doth stand for ever."

But there is a word of God which has gone forth, not merely in regard of the ruin which follows sin, but in regard of the method of recovery from that ruin ; and to that word, as to every other of the expressed determinations of God, there attaches the same character of unchangeable faithfulness. Every declared provision of the Gospel of the grace of God has the force and efficacy of law. It stands for ever. It may be trusted implicitly, and the believing soul may calculate, with as entire an assurance, on the connection between faith, true faith in Jesus, and the enjoyment of eternal life and glory, as it can calculate on the stable order of the universe. There is a comparison between such order, and the unfailing faithfulness of the promises of God to his people, in the prophecies of Jeremiah. And very impressive indeed are the terms of the comparison. "Thus saith the Lord ; if ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season, then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant." The promises of God in his word are thus represented as standing on the same footing with his covenant of the day and the night, his divine appointment that is, that there shall be day and night in their season. They are put on a level with the physical laws, of the stability of which we have such unvarying experience. They have the same regularity and efficacy. They are words of God, and partaking not at all of the frailty and mutability of man, who is grass and all his goodness as the flower of the field, they stand for ever.

And, how precious are those words of God which have this immutable force and efficacy. They tell of the blood of a great sacrifice which purges away the sin of every believing soul. They tell of a Saviour whose power and love extend to the guiltiest that will come to

him. They tell of a new and living way that has been opened up for sinners, even to the holiest of all. They tell of a fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, in which all may wash and be clean. They tell of that water of life of which whosoever will may take freely. They tell of a connection which no power in earth or hell can disturb, between penitence and peace, the faith of Christ working by love, and the life everlasting. They tell of mercy to the sinner, not according to the vague and unauthorized fancies of men speaking as they affect, in which to repose any confidence is to build a house upon the sand, but flowing to the sinner in an appointed channel, according to an appointed and divinely devised plan, and that plan fixed and unchangeable as the ordinances of heaven. Surely, if we stand in awe, as it is natural and reasonable we should, while contemplating the irresistible action and efficacy of the physical laws by which the universe is governed, and the still more terrible operation and result, either now appearing or revealed to our faith as hereafter to appear, of the moral laws of the divine government, well may we take comfort and rejoice with exceeding joy, in those gracious revelations of the Gospel, which have a like stability, which stand also among the unrepealed statutes of heaven, and can never pass away. Well may we rejoice in the declaration of the Apostle, while testifying that the word of the Lord endureth for ever, when he adds, "and this is the word, which by the Gospel is preached unto you."

Such is one use to which it behoves us to turn the impression we derive of the stability and irresistible efficacy of the natural laws which God has appointed, while witnessing some dire calamity which befalls under their operation. It is to transfer that impression to all the known expressions of the will of God ; it is to entertain it habitually in regard of the moral laws which God has established for the government of his creatures, as much as in regard of the

physical laws, which he has appointed for the material universe. The sinner impenitent, continuing in his sin, and persisting in the indulgence of it, may see, in the unsparing execution of a physical law, the token and evidence that equally unsparing shall be the operation of those moral laws, to which his moral condition renders him amenable, and equally vain, all hope or expectation of a mercy that shall save him, otherwise than through the medium of those laws, which having been spoken by God shall stand for ever. And the believer may rejoice in the equal stability which attaches to the gracious provisions and promises of the Gospel, from which his hope and happiness are derived.

But there is another use, to which we should turn our impression of the unswerving and irresistible operation of the natural laws which God has impressed upon the universe, and that a directly practical one. It is to bear in mind that since we can have no assurance that the operation of these laws may not at some unexpected moment be against us, and hurry us away from this life, it behoves us to make sure continually, that we are within the range and protection of those moral laws, that word of the Gospel, which has been preached to us for the salvation of our souls and for their admission into that heavenly state, which Christ has gone to prepare for His followers. It is very obvious that the stability of the laws of nature, however fatal in its consequences at times, is essential to the ordinary regulation of our conduct, to our safety and preservation in the world. Thus, if the action of fire or water were capricious and according to no settled law, if in the same circumstances it were sometimes safe and sometimes the reverse, we should have no rule to go by. As it is, there is room for prudence, prudence that shall in the great multitude of cases prove effectual. But what I would have you to consider is, that there is a limit set to the efficacy of any prudence which it is competent for an

individual to exercise. No prudence in one can insure prudence in all with whom in the daily intercourse of society he may be connected. And in the fullest exercise of all the prudence and foresight of which God has made him capable, a man may yet at any moment, by the imprudence of others, or by accidents over which no one can have any control, be placed in circumstances in which the world and all the world contains is nothing to him, and he must leave it for ever, for the presence and the judgment of God. It is thus that every one walks from day to day through life, amidst contingencies against which it is impossible to provide. In the midst of life we are in death. The very stable operation of those natural laws, which is essential to life, may yet at any hour hurry us from life. We never can be certain—positively and infallibly certain—of another day or another hour. At any moment the great crisis may come. Against such contingency no earthly wisdom can provide. But there is a wisdom which cometh down from above, and which is able to provide against all the evils of such contingency, yea and to convert it, if it comes, into a speedier entrance into the light and glory of our Father's house. That is the wisdom which inclines the heart to God and to His Son. That is the wisdom which feels, and acts upon the feeling, that now, now only, is the accepted time and the day of salvation. That is the wisdom, which seeks a present portion in the favour of God. That is the wisdom which will not defer till to-morrow, what God appoints as the work of to-day. That is the wisdom which leads the soul to Christ, and makes it live from day to day by the faith of Him. That is the wisdom, which listens reverently, and listens habitually, to the voice that is ever coming forth from the providence, as from the word of God, "Be ye also ready, for ye know not the day nor the hour. Boast not of the morrow, for thou knowest not what a day or an hour may bring forth." That is the

wisdom, which lays up Christ's words, as its richest treasure and its ever abiding ground of hope. That is the wisdom, which looking habitually to the grave, as soon to become the resting place of the body, and to the coming of death, as an event which may happen at any moment, does yet also look with confidence to the Saviour, who takes the sting from death and gives the victory over the grave. Oh! for such wisdom—true heavenly wisdom, the wisdom without which all else is vanity and folly.

That wisdom, reason approves, and conscience approves. And there is not one of us would like to think that he should die without it. That wisdom, how powerfully, and sternly, and awfully does not God teach us in the events of his providence, that we should seek, and seek now, and have always in exercise. And how lovingly and graciously in his holy word does He promise to bestow it, saying, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of me; I give to all liberally and upbraid not." And yet how little is it regarded or sought after. "Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets; she crieth in the chief places of concourse, in the opening of the gates; in the city, she uttereth her words saying, How long ye simple ones will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold I will pour out my spirit unto you; I will make known my words unto you." Oh! let not her testimony be still as it was of old: "I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded. But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof." And may God make it to us all a ground not of terror, but of everlasting consolation and good hope, that his word endureth for ever.

XIX.

THE ABSENCE OF CHANGE GIVING RISE TO UNGODLINESS.

PSALM LV.-19.

Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.

THERE are two kinds of changes, the absence of which may, each in a different way, give rise to ungodliness. One is general, affecting the universal government of God ; the other is special, having respect to families and individuals. It is obviously the latter which the text has in view. But the words used may naturally enough suggest the consideration of both.

And first, the absence of change or changes in the government of God. There is nothing which stands out in a more marked and manifest manner to any sober thinker, than the stability of what we are accustomed to call the laws of nature. The fluctuations of human society, the changes which take place from the caprice of human passions or the growth of human knowledge, have no parallel in the sure and steadfast operation of these laws. One generation of mankind passes away after another. But alike over the living world and the graves of the dead, the great forces of nature continue the same action. The sun rises and sets, the tides rise and fall, with undeviating regularity. The seasons return in due course. We can calculate with perfect certainty, on the heat of summer and the cold of winter, the soft showers of the spring, and the appointed weeks of the harvest. The laws by which these are regulated are of continual efficacy ; and so it is with all the elementary substances of which the earth is composed, every one of which is so under law, that in similar circumstances and combinations the same effect

is unavoidably produced. And this law of stable uniformity, which pervades all the arrangements of the earth on which we dwell, extends with equal force to the bright heavens which are stretched over our heads. Every planetary body moves, and has been known for ages to move, according to unchanging law. Nor can it be doubted that it is the same with the hosts of suns and systems, that are scattered with such boundless profusion through the universe of space. Now what should be the effect on us of such observed absence of change in the arrangements of the universe, such steady and systematic action throughout every portion of the universe, which we have an opportunity of observing? How should we be moved by the contemplation of this undeviating order, this all constraining and all controlling law? How in respect of ourselves, sojourners for a time, amidst the action of so many natural forces which admit of no alteration? How in respect of the great Being, who has set them in operation, and keeps them in operation, and has affixed them bounds and limits, beyond which they cannot pass? Why, as far as we are ourselves concerned, we should be bound to acknowledge, that only in virtue of such stability in the laws of nature, could man have life upon the earth. All his safety, all his comfort, is dependent on it. Without it, all his powers of body or mind would for these prove unavailing. If some wild caprice, such as a poet's fancy might conceive and describe, were to have place among the forces of nature, so that what has one effect this day, or hour, or minute, should have another the next, all provision for the common necessities of life would be impossible. Even if such change were contemplated, as of possible occurrence in the ordinary course of things, the apprehension of it would disturb and derange the whole frame of human society. If capricious change, if even frequent change, had place in the government of God, it would simply bring destruction on mankind. And then in regard of

God, should not the contemplation of the stability of natural law deepen our reverence both for his Almighty power and his infinite wisdom, while constraining us also to see in the exercise of these attributes, the tokens of his unspeakable goodness. Behold, all the forces of nature which in such terrible action, or unrestrained action, as we can readily conceive, might plunge the whole race into instant destruction, are in his hand, and He does so wield and govern them, as that in their ordinary working, they prove just occasion for the acknowledgment, that the tender mercies of God are over all his works ; He does so wield and govern them, that there is in effect a covenant in regard of them, between God and man—such covenant as in regard of some of them, He does Himself call in the prophecies, my covenant of the day and of the night ; in which covenant men trust, to which covenant God is faithful, the stability of natural law being the condition or promise of the covenant. This is that peculiar faithfulness celebrated in the hundred and nineteenth Psalm, together with the Almighty power of God, to whose word or law, the stable order of all things, in heaven and earth is ascribed. “For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven ; thy faithfulness to all generations : Thou hast established the earth and it abideth. They continue this day according to thine ordinances ; for all are thy servants.”

But while such was the feeling of the Psalmist, his just and reasonable feeling, such as it behoves us all to entertain while contemplating the stable order of the universe, is it with such feeling that that order is contemplated by all ? Why with some, especially in these days of unbelief, the effect produced is very different, and of a nature rather to shake or destroy their faith in the principles both of natural and revealed religion.

What reason, says one class, what reason is there to think that things were ever otherwise than they are ?

Why may not the same laws of nature, which have been in operation so long, have been in eternal operation, and producing an eternal succession of such results as we now witness? Looking back through the vista of long ages past, they discern no change, no tokens of change, expressive of will, only the incessant working of inflexible and unvarying law ; and so either speculatively, they accept the melancholy dogma of atheism, in some one of the forms which atheism assumes, or practically, God is so far removed out of and beyond the limits of ordinary thought and consideration, that He ceases to be an object of regard or reverence. Thus that very stability of natural law, which is indicative of the Divine perfection, which shews that the nature of God is altogether free from anything approaching to the weakness or capriciousness of man, and that in it almighty power and infinite wisdom appear as the agents and instruments of abounding goodness, is converted into ground and occasion both of speculative and practical ungodliness. "Because they have no changes," none that they can discern, "therefore they fear not God."

What reason again, says another class, not now looking back on past ages, but looking forward to the dark and mysterious future, not questioning now the first and fundamental truth of all religion natural or revealed, that God is, but regarding the predictions, whether couched in the form of promise or warning, that are contained in the Christian Scriptures, of the coming of a state of things vastly different from what obtains now, both in the physical and in the moral world— of a change so great in respect of the one that this earth and these heavens shall be dissolved and pass away, before another creation in which sin shall have no place, and in respect of the other that the season of probation shall be ended, and the season of retribution begun ; what reason, say they, can there be for anticipating the fulfilment of such predictions at all? Do

not all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation? Why suppose that they will cease to do so? Who ever heard of such changes in the time past? Why should we expect them in the time to come? Is not all our experience and all the experience of all our race, in favour of the stability of nature as we now see it? Why should we dream of the overthrow of that stability?

Where is the promise deemed so true,
That spoke the Saviour near?
E'er since our fathers slept in dust,
No change has reached our ear.
Years rolled on years, successive glide,
Since first the world began;
And on the tide of time still floats
Secure, the bark of man.

Thus that very stability of nature to which is owing the safety and enjoyment of life, the life that now is, is converted into a ground and occasion of distrusting and disbelieving the revelations of Scripture, concerning the future of life; a ground and occasion for evil-minded men to scoff at divine truth, and to walk after their own lusts. And so it may be said again, "Because they have no changes," because they neither experience nor apprehend them, "therefore they fear not God."

Now, in regard of these two classes of unbelievers, those whose views of the stability of nature in time past dispose them to lay aside as unnecessary to be entertained, the notion of an all-creating and all-sustaining God, and those whose expectations of the same stability in the time to come, derived from what they know and have learned of the past, dispose them to distrust and disbelieve the predictions of Scripture, there is the same general argument to be used. Their argument is shortly this. In the words of the text it is "they have no changes;" they see none, they experience none; therefore the one concludes there never were any, and the other that there never will be any.

It may be true, and it is true, that in our short day

of mortal life no change has taken place in the constitution and course of nature. Nor for long ages, during which many generations of our race have lived, and died, and been mingled with the dust, has there been the occurrence of any such change. But what is our time upon the earth, or what are the periods, measured by the lifetimes of men, in the working of that great Being, with whom one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day, whose goings forth have been of old from everlasting? Or what are they in comparison of the eternity which the one class of sceptics contemplates as past, and which the other contemplates as to come? There have been changes, though neither we nor our fathers were witnesses, nor could have been witnesses of them. The indications of such changes are inscribed with clear and unmistakable hand, on the very materials of which this solid earth is composed, indications of a state of things in which our present order could not have existed; indications of a period when man did not and could not have existed on the face of the earth; indications of a period when the races that peopled the earth or sea were wholly different from what they are now; indications of a period, when there could have been neither vegetable nor animal life, in the burning masses which gradually cooled into the rocks of the primitive formation. All this science teaches with unfaltering voice, reading the revelation of it on the broad page of the material world. Nor so far does any intelligent student of nature doubt its teaching.

Well, then, we say to the first class of unbelievers, if in the absence of changes in the order of nature, you see no intervention of will, here, in the presence or sure evidence of them, you may certainly perceive that intervention, and taking into consideration the nature of the changes, the intervention of Divine will, the will of an Almighty and all-wise God. What but the Sovereign will of such

a Being could effect the changes which must have taken place? What else could have transformed the chaotic mass in which matter was first created, into the various forms which there is evidence and proof of its having since assumed? What else could have placed it, in the various circumstances and under the special conditions, in which there is proof and evidence that it has since existed? What else could scatter the darkness that brooded over it, cover it with the rank vegetation which, dug out of the earth now in its fossilized state, is a main source of national wealth, and of individual warmth and comfort; filled it with tribes of living beings of various organizations, yet ever advancing to greater complexity and perfection, and finally placed man upon it, in body and mind the head and lord of this lower world. Surely if there was a time, and science as well as Scripture speaks of such a time, when man was not upon the earth, then when he was placed on it, such as he now is, intellectual and moral, and capable of rising in thought and affection to the Creator of all, no matter whether by direct creation or gradual evolution, there took place a change, in which only those blind to all reason can fail to trace the will, discern the hand, and adore the transcendent perfection of God.

And the same line of argument, argument founded at least on the same ground, the ground of changes which, though not under our eye must certainly have taken place, may be addressed to the doubter or disbeliever of the scripturally predicted changes that are yet to come—addressed to him, not for the purpose of establishing that such changes there shall be; that such changes shall be stands on the authority of the Scripture and the Scripture writers—but addressed to him for the purpose of shewing at least the possibility or probability of such changes. What has been may be again. The Power that interposed before may once more interpose. The Power

that accomplished what has been already done may accomplish all that is predicted to be yet done. And He, who has brought this earth through so many stages of progress, may bring forth the new heavens and the new earth, in which righteousness is to dwell and to have unchecked and unbroken ascendancy for ever and ever. Not on the ground of no changes, may either atheist or scoffer, the sceptic of bewildered understanding or of evil heart, defend his unbelief, or justify himself for casting off the fear of God.

But leaving this view of the subject, we now proceed to the other, more immediately suggested to us by the text, and having a more extensive practical application. The Psalmist is speaking of the worldly and the ungodly, those whose ungodliness originates, not in any speculative views of the unchanging order of things in nature, but which originates in a long continued course of prosperity in their own case. You can readily conceive the case of such a course of prosperity, extending over a long period,—not long, nay but of the very briefest duration, as compared with those periods of time of which we have just been speaking—but long as compared with the usual term of man's life, or as compared with such periods of prosperity, as are in the general run of cases vouchsafed. There are individuals and families who for years and years are thus exceptionally prosperous. They continue in the enjoyment of health. Wealth flows in upon them; they hold a fair, perhaps a conspicuous, place in society. They possess the respect, perhaps the good will, of their neighbours. The circle of friends and relations continues unbroken. The sun shines brightly on them; time passes gently over them; all goes smoothly with them; there seems some wall drawn around them, through which disease or death, or adverse fortune cannot penetrate, and life in their case seems divested of all the fluctuation and uncertainty which usually attach to it.

Now, here, as before, we ask, what should be the effect of such absence of change or changes, such lengthened and unbroken periods of worldly prosperity? Undoubtedly we might expect the result to be, and the result in all reason should be, a lively sense of gratitude to the giver of every good and perfect gift, a glad and habitual recognition of the abounding goodness of God. Where should we look for such a spirit with greater reason? In such a family, along with the melody of joy and health, which the Psalmist speaks of as to be found in the dwellings of the righteous, there should be heard also, and that from day to day, the melody of thanksgiving and praise. Whence if not from the members of it, or from whom, with the full tide of devotional sentiment, if not from them, should come the holy strains of the Psalmist, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Nor should such recognition of God be confined to devotional sentiment. Might it not reasonably be expected, that such sentiment should be accompanied with the exercise of those holy and charitable dispositions which God approves, and which the apprehension of divine love originates? Certainly so it should be. And we say not, but that so it often is. It is so indeed in all cases, in which the better blessings of grace are prized with and above the bounties of Providence, and God is recognized as the Saviour and Redeemer, as well as the Preserver and Benefactor. And no doubt, when such is the case, it is in such thankful and believing household, now enjoying God's gifts and living in the hope of glory with God hereafter, that earth presents its fairest type of heaven.

But while such should be the case, nay sometimes is, is it always or is it oftenest? Perhaps, in the majority of cases, it is the very reverse. The stability of fortune seems to give at length a sense of independent right to the en-

joyment of it. The regular and long continued enjoyment of prosperous fortune seems to quench the aspiration to anything above or beyond it. In the enjoyment of God's best worldly gifts, God himself is forgotten. The gifts occupy all the mind and all the heart, and the Giver is unthought of. In the easy flow of a prosperous life, the thoughts and desires of man's higher nature are apt to be repressed, kept down and smothered. Amidst ease and indolence, the soul comes to be satisfied with what is, what it has, what it enjoys. It is not subjected to changes. It comes not to look for them ; and in contented self indulgence, it ceases to feel any claim on it, for the exercise of veneration or gratitude. "Because it has no changes, therefore it fears not God." This is the danger of prosperity, and of prosperity long continued, the prosperity of the rich man in the parable, who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day ; the prosperity from which Agur prayed to be delivered, lest he should be full, and deny God ; the prosperity which renders it difficult for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God ; the prosperity of those, whom the Apostle emphatically charges not to be high minded, nor to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy, and to be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate. This is the prosperity which stands in need of warning ; and God gives it in his word and in the dispensations of his Providence. For long as changes may be of coming to some of us, they do come at last to all. Troubles come of various kinds, sickness comes, death comes, to break up the self indulgence and self satisfaction, which grow so naturally in and out of a prosperous life. Well, when these have efficacy to recall and revive a sense and fear of God. But, Oh, it is better far, when they find in the soul such sense and fear established.

It is difficult to compute the benefit of such changes

religiously, or in the way of stimulating the religious feelings, and keeping up in the human spirit a sense of the unseen and the eternal. Above all, the change which the presence of death makes—the carrying out of that sentence announced in the beginning after man's transgressions, *Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return*—that is the change which makes the deepest impression. It is a very terrible arrangement of Providence by which each and all of us must, in our turn, undergo the pangs of dissolution. It is a very terrible arrangement of Providence, by which we must again and again, when God so wills it, witness such dissolution in those dear to us. It is most terrible of all, when it breaks up a long course of prosperity and enjoyment. But it is an arrangement which has good and beneficent ends in view, ends which could not, so far as we can see, be answered so effectually in any other way. What gives so deep and indelible an impression of the unseen Power to which we are all subject, and over which we can exercise no sort of control, as the presence of death among us? What more surely bows down the proud spirit of man to humble supplication? What makes us look so keenly, and with such earnestness of regard, into the world of spirits? What compels us to think so seriously of our responsibility to that God, in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways? Why it is not perhaps too much to believe, that but for the continual recurrence of this great change among us, and that not only among those with whom we are but little connected and in whom we have little interest, but in the narrower circle of those who are specially near and dear to us, there would be, comparatively speaking, but little religious feeling in the world. The alienation of the natural mind from God is marked and manifest enough as things are now, the proneness of men to forget God, and to drive away all thought and consideration of responsibility to God. But who does not feel, that but

for the presence of death among us, that disregard and forgetfulness of God would assume the form and bear the fruits of a still more high-minded and high-handed opposition to His will ?

There are many memorials of God against which men can shut their eyes. There are many teachers of God, to whose lessons men can turn a deaf ear. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge of God. But how often is all they say or indicate of God unheeded or disregarded, by men busy in the pursuits of the world, and seeking only the gratification of their own appetites and passions. But when death comes with resistless potency into a house, Oh, how it speaks to the soul, of the weakness of man and the greatness of God ; how it compels acknowledgment of the Power above us, and gives a character of interest and importance to the truths and considerations of religion, which in other circumstances had been contemplated with indifference and unconcern. When was it, in the history of the world, that the sense of religious obligation was the weakest ; that men had reached the highest degree of ungodliness, and least regarded the will of their Creator ? Was it not in the ages, before the flood, when the imaginations of the thoughts of men's hearts were only evil, and that continually ? and was not that the period, when death was least familiar among men, and was removed from them at the greatest distance ? "Because they had no changes, therefore they feared not God."

There is warning, solemn warning, in the very verse from which the text is taken, to those who do so give way. "God will afflict them," it is said, "even He that abideth of old." If warnings will not be taken, judgments will come. The course of prosperity may take a sudden turn. The desire of the eyes may be taken away. God may lay his hand upon thee, thou worldly and ungodly, who

wilt not fear and honour Him. Nay, but do thou turn unto God, and he will yet have mercy upon thee. And though changes may and must come, changes involving bereavement and bitter anguish, they will come, not in the character of punishment with which God afflicts, but as discipline, with which He will prepare thee for the life of blessedness with Himself. What hope can any one have without the fear of God in him? The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him. The eye of the Lord is on them that fear Him. The angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear Him. There is no want to them that fear Him. The fear of the Lord tendeth to life; a holy life here, a life of everlasting blessedness in the world to come.

Yea, and that which under the old dispensation, as was suitable to its darker nature, was called the "fear of the Lord," rises unto a higher sentiment, under the new and better dispensation of these latter days, and bears a nobler name, even "the love of God." For now hath God revealed to men, that He is love and dwells in love. Now He has enabled us to comprehend the moral attributes of his nature, through the character and doings of that merciful Saviour, who, though He dwelt for a season in meek humility on the earth, was yet the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person. Now hath God given us, in the sufferings of his own Son, a measure of the unspeakable tenderness, with which he regards us sinful creatures, and his desire for our recovery, from the estate of sin, and of misery by reason of sin. Now hath God spoken to us, his children on the earth, by the pleading voice of Jesus, spoken words of promise, words of encouragement, words of divine compassion. Now He sendeth forth his Spirit, to enable us to discern spiritual truths, and to receive the things that be

of God. And if we turn not away with cold and unbelieving indifference from all the Gospel teaches, there should be in us a sense and assurance of God's love to us, creating in us a love to him, in some measure corresponding to his love to us, and inspiring into the soul the joy that is unspeakable and full of glory.

This revelation of divine love to sinful men is the Gospel, the glad news of great joy to all people. It is what imparts its chiefest value to the writings of Apostles and Prophets. It is that which should ever form the burden of the Christian ministry. Yet such is man, there is much to be done, to induce him to listen to it and to receive it; and much of instruction, warning and encouragement needed after he has received it, which must also form part of the work of that ministry. Some doubt it, and there must be set forth the evidence of its authority. Some shrink from it, because of the very weight of obligation, which they cannot but feel that the faith of it must and does impose; and some cannot easily be taken off from their ordinary cares and employments, to give heed to it. Therefore there must still be the preaching of the law, to prepare the way for the reception of the Gospel. The austere lessons of the Baptist must still precede the tender message of Jesus. But that the soul should receive, rest, rely on, rejoice in the love of God in Christ, that is the end of all. Wherefore do we preach, or you hear, but that this end may be gained? And how shall it be gained, as far as human instrumentality goes, but by declaring and setting forth that love, which is so to be trusted and so to be rejoiced in. And so now to each and all, and to myself, to every soul in this assembly, I say, as warranted by God's word, yea and as ambassador of God, and in Christ's stead, God loves thee, oh, sinner, and would have thee back again into his fold and family, and a partaker in due time of the heavenly glory and blessedness. God loves thee, and He has testified his love by his long for-

bearance towards thee, by gracious promises, and by an oath, wherein as He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself. God loves thee, and He has revealed the greatness and the tenderness of his love, in that he sent his Son to die for thee.

But He loves not thy sin. He will not have thee, full of evil thoughts and base affections. He will not have thee to enter into his kingdom, except as penitent, except as believing, except as penetrated with that divine principle of love, which consumes as with fire from heaven, every base and unworthy principle and passion, and raises the aspirations of the soul to the enjoyment of himself. Yea, because He loves thee, He will have thee to be free from that sin, which it is impossible even for Him to make other than a source of misery to thee. Turn not then away the eyes of thine understanding from the contemplation of this love of God. Pray for a better knowledge of it. Pray for a deeper sense of it. It is the faith of it which sanctifies and saves. Who has the faith of it dwelling in his heart will gain the victory over the world, and over sin, even the besetting sin, his worst and deadliest foe. It will enable him to say in the words of the hymn :

Father, I know that all my life
Is portioned out for me ;
And the changes, which will surely come,
I do not fear to see.

And it will make the last and greatest change of all, a change from life on earth to life in heaven.

XX.

WHY IS THERE NOT MORE EVIDENCE OF A FUTURE LIFE.

JOB XIV. 14.

If a man die shall he live again ?

IT is not so much the question of the text which I propose at present to consider, as another which in many minds grows out of it ; that is, why is there not more evidence of a future life, such evidence as would render the denial of it, or indeed any doubt or uncertainty about it, impossible ? This is a question which occurs at times to the minds of some who are neither disposed to deny the truth of a future life, nor to cast any disparagement on the nature or amount of the evidence which we actually have for it. It is recorded of the great English moralist, Johnson, that when expressing on one occasion much interest in some supposed supernatural appearance, as throwing light on the question of a future state, and being reminded of the evidence which we actually have for that state, he said, “ Yes, but I would like to have more ;” and the feeling thus expressed was not, I am persuaded, peculiar to him, or to persons of his peculiar temperament and constitution of mind. It rises up occasionally in most minds, and there is a certain uneasiness and dissatisfaction that God has left so great a matter liable to any possible doubt or suspicion at all. The question I have mentioned is therefore one by no means unsuitable or unnecessary to be taken up and seriously considered. Before, however, taking up this question, it may be useful to advert, very shortly, to the evidence for a future state which we actually have. There is a certain presumption for a future state,

in the very fact of our being so constituted that we cannot help entertaining the question, and being agitated by hopes and fears in regard of it. That we are so constituted is certain. The subject of a future existence enters into the musings of the roaming savage, as well as into the speculations of the philosophic sage. Now, why were we constituted so, if there be no ground, no real and just reason, to anticipate or to apprehend it? There is presumption still further for a future state, in the capacity of the human soul to advance indefinitely in knowledge and in excellence. To such advancement there seems to be no limit affixed, if only time and opportunity be afforded. And why should such high capacity of indefinite progress be conferred on man, if the time and opportunity for bringing it into exercise are not also to be vouchsafed? There is presumption again in the natural and reasonable apprehension which we all entertain, that the soul is something distinct from the material organization in which it is now placed, and through which it now acts, and that it is not composed of parts, but is essentially one; for if such apprehension is founded on truth, then the decay and dissolution of the body does not necessarily imply the destruction of the soul, nor is there in all nature any appearance of total annihilation, though there be constantly going on changes in the arrangement of things. And all these presumptions are strengthened by the conviction, to which, with more or less of hesitation we are led by the moral nature within us, that for the manifestation of the righteous government of God over the world, there is needed a future state of more exact retribution than the present. Then Christianity comes in to affirm positively what on other grounds appears to be probable. And in the attested fact of the resurrection of its great Author from the dead, it gives not only assurance of the divine authority by which He spoke, but proof experimentally that the nature of man can survive the shock of death and enter another state of existence.

Now what, it may be said, is wanting to this evidence? Nothing certainly, to a reasonable conviction, such as it is wise to act upon, and folly to resist or disregard. But it is not such conviction only, that the question under consideration indicates the desire of. Not disputing the presumptions of the natural reason, nor denying the authority of the Christian revelation, it calls for what neither of them gives, such evidence as would prove irresistible, such evidence as would render any degree of doubt or of uncertainty impossible. Now, in regard of any truths of which we are not ourselves immediately conscious, there are only two kinds of evidence by which this can be done, and one of them is inapplicable to the case before us. The one is that demonstrative evidence which obtains in arithmetic or geometry, in virtue of which we can say of a proposition proved by it, not only that it *is* true, but that it *must* be true, and that doubting would be absurd. But this is a kind of evidence which we can have only for abstract truths, not for any actual existence, unless it be the existence of God himself. That two and two make four is not only true, but the denial of it would be absurd. That there is a future state may be true, but the denial of it is not absurd; at most it is only false. This kind of absolute certainty, attainable in regard of certain abstract truths, is not attainable then in respect of a future state. But there is another kind of evidence, which communicates the same impression of certainty. And that is the evidence of the senses. Though not coming like the former, through the channel of pure reason, it is equal in its power to command our convictions, to remove our doubts. We feel certain in regard of what we can see, and hear, and touch.

Now, it cannot be denied, that in respect of a future state such evidence might have been given. For anything we know, or can tell, the evidence of sense might have been superadded in this great matter, to the deductions of reason

and the declarations of the Scriptures. For anything we can tell, men might have been made capable of visiting the unseen world, into which the spirits of all are at death removed, of looking with the bodily eye on its now hidden and inscrutable wonders, and of bringing back from the view the same sense and conviction of the reality of that world, as we have of the reality of the actual world in which we dwell. For anything we can tell, it might have been made possible for the disembodied spirit to revisit the world which it had left, and to convey the same impression of its own existence, and the same certainty as to the place of its abode in the new state of being, as is communicated by a traveller returning from a residence in a distant land. For anything we know, it might have been possible to have established some such communication between this world and the next, as to make the latter as much as the former a matter of sense and of observation, and so leave it beyond the possibility of doubt, that death, with all that is distressing and alarming about it, is only a pathway from the one unto the other. And why, says the impatient spirit of man, why is it not so? Why should such conviction of the senses be denied me, as I stand by the cold remains of a departed friend, or while I anticipate the moment of my own dissolution? Why, in such trying circumstances, should I be obliged to walk by faith only, and not by sight?

Such enquiries we would be entitled to meet, with the words of the Apostle in regard of yet deeper mysteries: "Nay, but who art thou, man, who repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him who formed it, why hast thou made me thus?" Such is the state in which God hath placed thee. Such is the amount of knowledge which God hath given thee. It is not for thee to murmur or be dissatisfied with the conditions of that state. It is not for thee to complain that such knowledge is not more extensive. It is for thee to conform to these

conditions, and to act on what it has been given thee to know. Thou must not shut thine eyes upon the light, because that light might have been made to shine more brightly. Thou must not disregard the evidence which God hath given thee of a future life, because it might have been made clearer and more overwhelming. Be content. There are reasons, whether thou canst or canst not find them out, why thou shouldst now see but darkly, as through a glass, and why thou art required all thy life below, to act upon that faith, "which is the evidence of things not seen, and the substance of things hoped for."

But it is not exactly in this way, that we wish now to meet such enquiries. We would rather entertain them, and see whether there be accessible to us any reasons, why even for our own behoof, the conditions of our present state of being should not, in respect of a future state, be different from what they are; reasons why we should be not only resigned to those conditions, but satisfied with them.

Now, there is one consideration in respect of this matter, which readily presents itself, and is not without an important bearing on it. That is, that for anything we know, nay more than this, very probably such sensible revelation of the future world as is thus desired, would very materially interfere, and very injuriously, with the duties and the enjoyments of this world. In the knowledge and clear apprehension of more exalted and extensive powers, hereafter to be bestowed, there might be generated an indifference about the use of those which we do actually possess. In the knowledge and with the clear apprehension of the more exalted employments and pleasures of the future state, there might grow up in the soul a distaste for those which are most suitable for it now. The conviction of a future state is a very important one, very necessary for many good ends, very strengthening to good principles, very comforting amidst troubles and trials. But such sensible acquaintance with that state, as the evidence

required implies and involves, might it is easy to conceive, have an opposite effect, unfitting us for the duties of that state in which it is God's will, and for our good, that we should at present be.

If it should be said in answer to this, that such injurious effect on the common duties and employments of the world might or might not follow, that such effect cannot be spoken of as certain, but only as possible or probable, that the feeling of certainty communicated by the informations of sense might, in respect of the now unseen world, be given without such further and extensive knowledge of that world, as might give rise to imaginations and desires inconsistent with the conditions of our present state of being, while on the other hand such sensible evidence would be of unspeakable value, and have an almost irresistible force to lead men to a religious life, we would interpose a doubt as to the probability of any such result. No doubt such is the end, which it is thought that better, or at least more overwhelming evidence, would serve. But would the end be attained? Would it give more effective influence to religious truths and considerations? Would it prove a stronger and more persuasive argument for repentance, than any which the soul has now to deal with. Why, I think it may be fairly doubted.

For what is it, I ask you, which stays any man now from repentance, from leading a life such as the Bible requires? Whatever it be, this at least is certain, it is not doubt as to whether it is a wise thing to persist in sin. It is not doubt, as to whether it is a right thing to live without regard to God, and to His will. How many, who are still leading a worldly and careless life, will readily admit their full conviction of the sinfulness and folly of so doing, will profess with perfect sincerity, that they wish they could lead a godly and religious life, as they know they ought to do; will freely acknowledge their belief and assurance that so to do would both make them happier now,

and lead to future happiness. The soundness of the arguments, with which the word of God urges them to enter on the service of God, they do not dispute. On these points the certainty of their conviction would not be at all increased by any increased evidence of the unseen world, would not be increased, though they could visit that world themselves, or though an inhabitant of that world should visit them, and in personal intercourse make them acquainted with its wonders. How then, should such evidence have greater efficacy to lead them to repentance? Is the mere sight of the supernatural to change the heart, to renew the will, to overthrow sinful passions reigning in the soul, to break the chains of evil habit, and implant the love of what is holy and good? That is to suppose an effect without any adequate cause to produce it. No, if men will not hear Moses and the Prophets, Christ and the Apostles, even when these are speaking to their own convictions of what is true, and right, and of binding obligation, and of undeniable expediency, "neither will they be persuaded though one did rise from the dead"—neither will they be won upon, or gained from sin to holiness, from Satan to God, by any brighter or more sensible evidence of future life.

But suppose it were otherwise; suppose such sensible evidence of a future state as would leave no possibility of doubt as to its existence, any more than there is doubt of the existence of this present state; suppose, I say, that it would have the effect which is expected by some; suppose it gave such weight, and power, and urgency to every argument for repentance and for a religious life, as no soul could be hardy enough, or wicked enough to resist, and men were acted on thereby with the force and certainty of a mechanical impulse; is that a state to be desired for man, in which such evidence should be given? I say No, for the more certainly and completely we should thus be acted upon by external and sensible things, the nearer should we

approach to the condition of mere unreflecting, unreasoning, passive machines. Change so wrought would be change, not according to the laws of our nature, but overpowering them and setting them at defiance. It would be change, not of a sinful man into a holy man, so that thenceforth he should freely will and do of the good pleasure of God, but it would be change of the nature of man, a change of man into a lower and less gifted being. It is the noble characteristic of our nature to be capable of contemplating and being influenced by the unseen, the future, the distant, as well as by what is visible, present, near. If, in the moral treatment of a man this characteristic be disregarded, if he be acted on only by application to the senses, he is obviously treated as a child, and as being subject only to those influences which can be brought to bear upon childhood. Yea, and such treatment will tend to keep him a child, to lower altogether the style of man, and make him a far less noble being than God intended him to be.

If it had pleased God so to act upon men from the beginning, not through the medium of truth more or less clearly revealed to the understanding and the conscience, and through them acting on the affections, but by the surprise and the terror of things supernatural, revealed in sensible manifestations, He might have preserved our first parents from sinning at all. He might have preserved the whole race from sinning. But then our first parents would have been different from what they were, the whole race would have been different from what it is, different, not only in the accident of sin, but different in essential nature. There would in that case have been an inferior race of beings in the world, not sinful, nor subject to become sinful, but inferior in character and capacity to man. But so God willed it not to be. His purpose was, that at the head of this lower world there should be beings of a higher order, and acted on by higher and nobler impulses. And

we must not start back from the conditions and the responsibilities of the higher nature which God has given us, or once imagine that at one and the same time we may have the capacities, and anticipate the destiny of men, and be dealt with as machines, or as children.

It is with the other great doctrines of religion, both natural and revealed religion, as it is with the doctrine of a future state. There is evidence of them, evidence to satisfy, but not evidence to overpower, not sensible evidence, not such as would leave no room or opportunity for any manifestation of the feeling, with which truth is regarded. So it is with the being and the Government of God himself, the invisible Father of all. So it is with the mediation of the Saviour, who though once revealed has now entered within the veil. So it is with the working and influences in the world and in the hearts of men, of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. So it is with the agency and the temptation of evil spirits. So it is with the ministry of angels to those who shall be heirs of salvation. So it is with the history of God's interposition in the times that are past. So it is with the predictions and promises of things that are yet to come. There is no such power or force, in respect of any of these exercised over the mind, as would be produced by an application to the senses. There is evidence for them all, yet not the evidence of sight or sense. In regard of them all, essentially as the sense and conviction of each and all of them are connected with a right moral and religious state, men have to act upon that faith which is the evidence of things not seen. In regard of each of them, there have been it is true, at particular times, in particular circumstances, for particular ends affecting individual and general good, sensible and supernatural manifestations ; but to make these the regular, the common, ordinary course of things, would be to change the whole order of the heavenly government, and to render it unsuitable to the nature, capacities and destinies of creatures, such as men are and are designed to be.

In respect of these great objects of faith, there is obviously a twofold purpose on the part of God, to try men, their disposition towards the truth, and to discipline men by means of the truth. And neither of these purposes could be attained by such sensible manifestations as would render doubt or difficulty impossible.

One purpose is to try men, their disposition towards the truth. When He who was Himself the Truth came into the world, it was said of Him, by the aged Simeon, "Behold this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be spoken against, that the thoughts," evidently here, the moral temper and dispositions, "of many hearts may be revealed." And every part and portion of Divine truth revealed to man, yea, and with more or less of evidence, in different ages and under different dispensations, serves the same end, to reveal, make manifest, in regard of Divine truth generally and the duties which it involves, the thoughts of many hearts. The amount of truth for this end signifies comparatively little. "The moral experiments of the world," says a recent author, "may be tried with the smallest quantities. The searcher of all hearts, may make as ample a trial of you in your conduct to one poor dependent, as of the man who is appointed to lead armies and to administer provinces. Nay, your treatment of some animal entrusted to your care may be a history as significant for you, as the chronicles of kings for them." Of such truth, there has always been enough revealed to serve the purpose of trial. In every age some have been prompt to receive it, to love it, to long for more of it, to manifest an affinity to it, and a sympathy with it. These have been the saints and the excellent of the earth, the men of whom the world was not worthy, seeing the promises only afar off, but being persuaded of them, and having embraced them. In every age too, there have been who have rejected the truth, turned from it, cared not to know it or to pursue

and seek after it or the traces and indications of it. These are they who have loved darkness rather than the light their deeds being evil. Account for this difference in men how we will, it exists; it always has existed. And it seems the design of Providence, by the way in which divine truth is revealed, to bring out and to make manifest the difference, and to separate men into two great classes, those who receive the truth in the love of it, and those who believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness. It is not revealed so as to carry men's convictions as it were by storm, by force, independent of the will; but it is so revealed as to be discernible in itself and in its evidence, to those whose hearts are prepared to receive and to welcome it. It were well that we all should examine our own characters, by this very test which God himself applies to us. It is not the amount of truth we know or receive, but our disposition towards it, which reveals character. Do we value it? Do we reverence it? Do we yield to it in so far as it manifests itself to our reason and our consciences? The true answer to these questions will reveal our true moral state, and show how, if unchanged, we shall stand hereafter, on the right or on the left hand of the Judge, who is to pronounce the final destiny of all.

But it is also the purpose of God to discipline men by means of the truth. The order of Providence in regard of man is not merely to make him do or leave undone certain things. It is the formation of character which is contemplated, the establishment of principles within him, to which, by frequent acting upon them, there shall be given at length the force and stability of habit. And these circumstances are to be considered the most suitable and the most favourable for man, viewed as a moral and immortal being, which conduce most to form in him the highest character and give rise to the purest virtue. But such are not the circumstances, in which all is smooth and

easy to be done, in which no darkness overhangs the path to be trodden, and every motive to tread it acts as with the force of a law of matter. It is amidst difficulties and perplexities and troubles that the highest powers of the soul are called into action, so that these, how grievous soever they be at the time, prove in the end to have been blessings, and are ground of thankfulness to the soul that has been purified and ennobled by means of them. Thus it is with the highest style even of the worldly character. Thus it is with the religious character. Not in vain has it been said, that it is through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom of God.

Now this order of Providence, in its purpose and in its result, extends to the manifestations of truth as well as to the events of life. Which, I ask you, would give rise to the most earnest efforts, bring out the highest qualities, and form the most perfect character ; a state in which all truth to be known, moral or religious, should be conveyed to the mind, with the ease, and the certainty, and the completeness of a sensible manifestation, or that in which the soul does but partially see it, and must seek with all earnestness, if haply it may feel after it and find it, and must watch every indication of it, and live and act by faith in what is revealed to the understanding, though unaccompanied by the irresistible evidence either of demonstration or of sense ? We uphold it that it is the latter of the two ; that out of the struggle and the search after truth, and the life of faith in the unseen, and hope of what is to be hereafter revealed, there will and must emerge, a character far higher and nobler than could ever be formed under the compulsion and pressure, so to speak, of more sensible manifestations. And more sensible evidence now of a future state would tend to disturb and deteriorate the preparation which is needful, for entering on the full glory and blessedness that are destined for men in that state.

Nay, and this state of things in which truth is but partially revealed, and the soul has to struggle for clearer manifestations and take much on trust, is what we do believe, shall continue for ever. It is true, that in a certain sense in the future life, believers shall see God face to face. It is true, that in respect of many things now hidden from us and inaccessible to us, we shall know even as we are known. But so it shall not be of all things. So it cannot be of all, of much, nay of most. Only the Divine mind can contemplate and comprehend fully, perfectly, and for ever, the whole of range infinity, all the past, all the present, all the future, all the actual, all the possible combinations of things. The highest efforts of the loftiest of created minds shall after a lapse of eternal ages be still at a distance beyond all conception, from this fulness of divine wisdom and knowledge. And the highest angel, who stands the nearest to the throne of the Eternal, shall, in contemplation of a government which extends over all the worlds that roll in space, and over every moral being that inhabits them, be still as ready, and find it still as reasonable, as do we poor children of a day, to take up, in humble and devout acknowledgment, the sublime exclamation of the Apostle, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed to him again? For of him and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever."

We may safely hold that man in the future state, as here in this present state, will contemplate this heavenly government, will study its order, moral and material, striving ever to become better acquainted with it, finding in such efforts a source of purest happiness, and becoming in consequence of them a nobler and a more godlike being.

We may hold this simply because there is no intimation that in that state the essential nature of man is to be changed. Man in it will be sanctified, glorified, but he will still be man. He cannot be as God knowing all. He will not be reduced to the level of the inferior animals, whose range of attainment has a limit which is soon reached, and can never be overpassed. The perfection of man is not that of a being who has reached the utmost limit of knowledge and worth, nor that of God which is infinite. His nature admits of a continual progress ; his glory is to be making it, striving, even amidst difficulties, to make it. And difficulties there will be in the mighty field that is before him, difficulties from our notion of which, we may properly abstract every idea of pain or of sorrow, but which shall task the utmost energies even of the renewed and redeemed spirit. There will ever be mysteries to be solved and faith to be exercised. Truths will be seen but partially, and as one brightens into more perfect manifestation, another will appear behind it dimly and in the distance, like one mountain range rising after another. And so there will ever be scope and occasion, for the exercise of every power with which the great Creator has endowed the human understanding. This is heaven, to be ever loving and ever learning ; to have the affections ever called into greater warmth, for all that is excellent and good ; to be ever growing in knowledge, yet ever standing on the threshold of mysteries, which are being gradually unveiled to the eager and enquiring soul.

Let us not then complain that in respect of the future life, the conditions of our being are not different from what they are. God has arranged them well and wisely. He has given us evidence of that life which it would be the extreme of folly to disregard ; evidence which carried the convictions, and guided the conduct, and raised the hopes and expectations of innumerable multitudes, who are now around the throne on high, dwelling in that city,

whose builder and maker is God, and worshipping in that heavenly sanctuary, which needeth no light of the sun or of the moon to lighten it, for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. Far from us be the epicurean sentiment denounced by the Apostle, "let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Let us strive, with the help of God and as constrained by the love of Christ, to live as become those who expect to live forever, and to live with God, and with Christ, in the heavenly kingdom.

XXI.

THE PURPOSE OF CHRIST'S DEPARTURE, AND THE PROMISE OF HIS RETURN.

ST. JOHN XIV. 2, 3.

In my Father's house are many mansions : if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself ; that where I am there ye may be also.

THE special trouble, which when these words were spoken, was afflicting the hearts of the disciples, was the prospect of the speedy departure of their Master from among them, an event which no previous warning had induced them seriously to anticipate, but which now they could not help considering as at hand. And the special ground of comfort which our Lord suggested to them, under the painful feelings caused by the prospect of such bereavement, was, first, the purpose of his going, "I go to prepare a place for you"; and, second, the promise of his return and of their re-union with him: "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."

It is not to be supposed, that either the purpose or the promise could be very adequately or accurately comprehended by the disciples. What did Jesus mean, by his Father's house? What, by the many mansions which he said were in it? What, by the need of preparing a place for his followers? What the nature of the preparations required? Such are questions, which the words of Jesus, in the passage before us, having reference to the purpose of his going, would naturally call forth in the minds of the disciples, and to which neither their own reflections, nor any revelation which they had received could enable them, any more than the same

sources of information enable us, to give a full and satisfying answer. Then again as to the promise of return, it can hardly, I think, be doubted, that they would look for a greatly more speedy fulfilment of it, than actual experience has shewn to have been intended. Very possibly the expectation that would rise in their minds would be of a return, after a few days, or months, or years, a return which they would live to witness and to rejoice in. Nor were they likely to be visited with the imagination, that after well nigh two thousand years had passed away, the time and manner of the Messiah's second coming would still be matter of mystery and of expectation to believers.

Were then our Lord's words, because of such incapacity on the part of the disciples fully or accurately to comprehend all that they implied, unsuited to the end of imparting consolation, for which they were spoken? Or did they therefore necessarily fail to attain this end? Certainly not. That in them, which the disciples did comprehend, served the needful end. That in them, which successive generations of believers have comprehended, has continued with blessed efficacy, to serve that end. They would be treasured in the remembrance of the chosen disciples till their last hour, and not least by that beloved one, who has recorded them, and whose privilege it was, not only to listen to the tones of tenderness with which they fell from the Master's lips, but to lean on his bosom while they were being spoken. And heaven is now thronged with spirits of the just made perfect, whose hearts in the days of their earthly pilgrimage, while yet unreleased from the burden of the flesh, those words of Jesus swelled with lofty hopes and joy unspeakable and full of glory.

The truth is, Christ's words,—God's words in the Scripture that is, for is not Christ one with God, even the Father—are not only, as the Psalmist says, "pure words, as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times," not only, as the Apostle says, "faithful words," and worthy of all

acceptation, on which the immortal spirit, even in its bitterest troubles and in its last hours, may rest with unhesitating confidence. They are also both plain words, having true meanings, which even a child, or he whom his intellectual and moral training has left with but childish powers of reasoning and reflection, can readily and profitably apprehend ; and deep words, pregnant with meaning, from which the contemplative and believing mind may be ever drawing fresh treasures of wisdom and knowledge. It is this union of the plain and the deep in meaning, in Christ's words, which gives to them their peculiar suitableness to all ages, all classes, all generations of mankind. Take the words of the text for example. No doubt the questions which we before mentioned as likely to have been called forth in the minds of the disciples, by our Lord's declaration of the purpose of his going away from them, remain still matter for reflection, high, purifying, and profitable reflection, to the mind that is studious of divine truth and longs to catch every ray of light that comes from the uncreated source of all light ; and so also the question remains, as to when the Saviour shall come again. But on the very surface, as it were, there is expression, patent to the humblest, precious to the loftiest in understanding, who will receive the truth of the tender and unceasing care of Jesus over his followers, and assurance of an everlasting union with him in a new and glorious life. And what purer or better source of consolation can any believing soul desire ?

Nor let it be supposed, that in so speaking of Christ's words, we do represent them as of doubtful or enigmatical import, or as partaking of the nature of riddles, in which the thought intended is designedly concealed, or like the heathen oracles of old, which might be understood in different ways. It is not common to all language to have such large and deep meaning as Christ's. But it is common to all language to convey more or less, according to the capacity of comprehension in the mind to which it is

addressed. And the same words, as that capacity advances by reason of advancing age, or better training, or deeper thinking, will convey not perhaps different or contradictory, but yet more and deeper meaning. Take for example such simple, in one sense at least simple, proposition as this : "God made the world." A child, of even a few years, apprehends meaning in that, meaning satisfying to his reason, which will have a cause of all, and raising in him wonder, awe, and worship ; true meaning, therefore, important meaning, sublime and solemn meaning. But no one can suppose that it will convey to his mind the same ideas, the same fulness of meaning, as to one whose mind has been long exercised in contemplating the attributes and perfections of the Deity ; as to one, to whose enlightened and cultivated mind, the word "world" suggests such infinite combinations of wise and benevolent design, carried out with all the resources of omnipotence ; as to him, to whom science has unvailed the slow—to us children of a day that is—slow and gradual process, in which through a succession of ages, a world at last emerged from the primitive chaos, ready for the reception of beings, created in the image and after the likeness of God. Each word, God—made—the world—has to the one a depth of meaning, which it has not to the other, but to which the other may ultimately reach, under the training of mind and heart, which the more advanced in wisdom and knowledge has undergone. Just so it is that the words of Scripture, while conveying important meaning to all, may carry unspeakably more to some than to others. Just so it is, that the same words may convey to the same mind unspeakably more and deeper meaning now, than they did at some less advanced period of its progress in knowledge and spiritual understanding.

It is not then the understanding which we may suppose, reasonably suppose, the disciples had of these words of our Lord, at the time they were spoken, or even subsequently, with which we have to do, as if we were limited to that

Even when Prophets and Apostles spoke themselves of things future and unseen, they did not always comprehend the full meaning of what they were commissioned to reveal to the Church. Often it required the revolution of long time, and much further unfolding of the divine purposes, to make clear what these revelations meant. It is not their understanding of Christ's words, but Christ's words themselves, in all the amplitude of meaning which is to be found in them, which we have to consider; never limiting his meaning by their understanding, but seeking to ascertain, the fulness of truth which is contained in the words themselves.

Take first then the avowed purpose of our Lord's departure from among his disciples. In stating that purpose, he speaks of his Father, God that is, the source and fountain of Deity, and whom he calls not only "the Father," the common Father that is, to enable us to look up to him with filial confidence, and to judge warrantably, and most comfortably, of the Divine Nature, by the instincts and affections of our own, but his Father, to indicate the special relation in which he, the Son, stood to him, as the Word that was in the beginning with God, and one with him. There was no doubt comfort then, there would be more afterwards to the disciples, when they knew more perfectly this high nature, in the tender and loving Master, who had chosen them for his special companions and servants; and it is the conviction of the high and divine nature in the Saviour, which both magnifies the love of God in the redemption, and gives assured hope of the ultimate restoration of those who are by faith united unto Christ, and have, as it were, one common, inner and spiritual life with Him. He speaks too, of "his Father's house," and of the many mansions that are in it. In common language, a house means a man's dwelling place, his habitual residence. What then can be said to be God's house—the Father's house—or dwelling place? "Behold," said Solomon in his

sublime prayer at the dedication of the temple, "Behold, the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him." And in so saying, he did but follow the spirit of those noble strains in which David his father had celebrated the praises of the Godhead. "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there; if I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." Wheresoever space is, God is, always was, always will be. His presence pervades the universe. Is not then the universe his house? and the rooms, the separate mansions, what can these be but those glorious systems, like the leaves of the forest, or the sand on the seashore innumerable, with which the firmament of heaven is studded, and of which, it may be, only a small portion is in any way revealed to the eye of man, among which our sun and its revolving worlds have their appointed place. Take it that it were so, we may not say it is so, then the import of the Saviour's words would be: Think not that this earth which I am about to leave, how beautiful and glorious soever, and ample in its provision for the accommodation of man, is the only mansion in the universe which is fit for the inhabitation of God's children. The universe is filled with such. If I leave one, it is to go to another. If you, in your turn, are to be withdrawn from this known familiar world and all that it contains of what you have admired and loved, it will be to be introduced into another. Your removal will not be the extinction of being, of life, of sensibility, of happiness. It will be change only, from one to another of the many mansions of your great Father's dwelling place. "If it were not so, I would have told you." Not by me, will you be lured by false expectations, or bid to cherish groundless hopes. "I go to prepare a place for you."

And what place then, according to these views of the subject? what may we suppose of the nature of it? Why, think of what we are told elsewhere of the future of the redeemed, and of what we are told, of the working of Christ, not as the Mediator only, but as the Eternal Word who was in the beginning with God. In respect of the future of the redeemed, St. Peter in his second Epistle, after declaring that the day of the Lord would come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens should pass away with a great noise, and the elements melt with fervent heat, and the earth also, and the works that are therein be burned up, adds: "Nevertheless, we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness;" the promise referred to, being probably that in the sixty-fifth chapter of the prophecies of Isaiah, "Behold I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind." And St. John in the Apocalyptic vision, describing the glory of the redeemed, after the day of final judgment was passed, says, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea." May we not then suppose, that it is this new heaven and new earth, this new and glorious mansion in God's house, to make use of the phraseology of the text, which Jesus went to prepare, and which He is now preparing for the final dwelling place of his redeemed?

And here we may properly take into account, both what Scripture teaches and what sciences teaches, concerning the formation of these glorious orbs, some of which are to pass away having served their destined purpose, and others, more bright and glorious still, to come into existence.

Scripture speaks of God as the maker of all things. But then it also teaches, that while the energy of the undivided Godhead was put forth in the work of creation, it

was through the immediate agency of the Son--the Word who was with God and was God, and in the fulness of time became flesh and dwelt among men -- that the work was accomplished. "By him" that is the Son, it is said in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "God made the worlds." In the Gospel of St. John it is said: "All things were made by Him, that is by the Word, and without Him was not anything made, that was made." And in the Epistle to the Colossians, Christ, that is as before the Son, or Word, is said to be the first born or Lord of the whole creation; "for by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones; or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by Him and for Him." What more natural then, than to suppose that He who created the heavens and the earth that are now, and which are destined in the purpose of heaven to pass away, shall be also the Creator of the new heavens and the new earth, which are never to be defiled or degraded by the presence of sin, but righteousness to have its abiding place in them for ever? And to such creative energy, about to be put forth, and for the special benefit of his people, is it not natural to suppose that he had reference, when he said, as in the text, "I go to prepare a place for you."

But "prepare," what does he mean by the use of the word prepare? Does not that word seem to imply time, labour, anxiety to put all things right? And is it, can it be necessary, for God to say more than "let it be done," to have all that is desired, accomplished? Here it is that science comes in with its teachings on the subject of creation. Of the first creative act, it can indeed say nothing, except reason that it must have been. But it does find and give ample proof, that to prepare this earth for the inhabitation of man, was a work of time, a work accomplished during a long succession of ages, in which at intervals there were peculiar interventions of the Divine

power. It is not how God might have done, with which we have to do, but with what he did, if we desire to judge by analogy with the past of his future doings. And geology, if it teaches anything at all with certainty, teaches this, the long period of preparation which this earth underwent before man was placed upon it. And why may we not suppose, that some analogous preparation is now going on, and under the same agency as the Scriptures reveal in the former case, of the new heaven and the new earth, where the redeemed of the Lord are to have their final and glorious dwelling place? Or, that as in the first creation, there was a space of time for the elimination of light, and a space for the separating of earth and sea, and a space for decking the earth with tree, and shrub, and flower, and a space for bringing into view the bright lamps of heaven, and a space for filling air, and earth, and water with life, before man was created in the image and placed in the paradise of God; so in regard of the second creation, which is to have place when the first has passed away and shall no more be remembered or come in mind, a still more glorious preparation may be going on, and under the direction of the same hand and mind—His, who said to the sorrowing disciples in the text, “I go to prepare a place for you.”

It is not for us to say, Why does not God speak and it is done. That is not God's way of working. God is patient, says a German proverb, because he is eternal. We poor children of the dust, dwelling in cottages of clay, and crushed before the moth, because our time, our time here, is all we think of or care about, we are impatient, eager to have, to clutch, to enjoy what we can, lest in the lapse of our short allotted time we should altogether lose our chance. But so it is not with God. The conditions of his being are altogether different. Time, in our sense and in our divisions of it, has no place with him. With him one day is as a thousand years and a thousand

years as one day. He is not impatient to have his work completed. A thousand years, or a thousand centuries of years, are the same to him. He can afford to wait, and so he works by slow degrees, yet with glorious result ; giving time through centuries to the acorn to grow up into the magnificent oak ; giving time through successive millenniums to the primitive chaos to become the well ordered system, in the enjoyment of the unnumbered blessings of which, we live and move and have our being ; giving time, too, through successive ages for the Gospel leaven to work a regenerating influence in the moral world. And so we may suppose, in some region yet unvisited and unknown of the universe of God, under the eye and by the agency of the creating Word, there may be in process of formation, brighter skies and lovelier scenes than imagination ever pictured, and the new heaven and the new earth be becoming meet field for the energies, and fully furnished for the enjoyment, of the redeemed ; not the small weeping band of disconsolate disciples who sat around the Saviour, on the night on which he was betrayed, but the whole glorious company of the sanctified and saved, who through their word and testimony did after believe in his name. No reason is there to suppose that the work of creating, or the carrying on, in worlds already formed, the work of preparation for higher and more exalted orders of beings, does ever cease throughout the universe. Astronomers tell us that stars which once shone in the firmament have ceased to appear, and that new stars are coming into view, either their distance having rendered them hitherto inaccessible to our senses, or because they are but of recent creation. "My Father worketh hitherto," said Jesus, "and I work."

The same view of the eternity of God, and the same analogy of his mode of procedure by degrees, in which time, as it is measured by us, is but little regarded, will stand us in stead while considering his promise of return,

as well as his purpose in going. The disciples might well imagine that the promise, and the exhortations connected with it, were exclusively for them. And they might expect a speedy fulfilment of the promise. But it was not so that Jesus intended either. The intercessory prayer, at the conclusion of the long discourse from which the text is taken, shows clearly that he had regard to all his disciples in all time. "Neither pray I for these alone," said he, "but for them also which shall believe in me through their word." And the result has shewn the general bearing of the word and promise, in this remarkable discourse, since in every country to which the Gospel has penetrated, and to every heart which has felt its power, such word and promise have been precious, in all time of trouble, upholding and comforting. In particular the special promise of the second coming was not specially for the immediate disciples of the Lord. It had, and was intended to have, reference to all his followers, being to them, in every age, a ground of joyful expectation. Neither are we to think the interests of the disciples of the first or of succeeding ages overlooked or disregarded, because the fulfilment of the promise is delayed; nor because of that delay, to doubt of the fulfilment of the promise at all. The true disciples of Christ, when they depart from this life, enter into glory. They are with Christ, and are partakers of his blessedness and glory. They are in a state in which there is no sin, in act or tendency, and so no sorrow. And if the constitution of man's nature be not wholly changed, which there is no reason to suppose, for man redeemed and glorified will still be man, a new creature as free from sin, but not new as respects the essential elements and capacities of his nature, if, I say, the constitution of man's nature be not wholly changed, the excitement of hope in respect of this still more perfect and exalted state of being, on which they shall enter after the resurrection, and when

Christ shall have presented to himself, the whole body of the redeemed, a glorious Church, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, must add to their present happiness. It is not much we know of the intermediate state of the saints between death and the resurrection. But

This much, (and this is all) we know,
They are completely blest ;
Have done with care and sin and woe,
And with their Saviour rest.

And as to the delay in the fulfilment of the promise, it is to be considered, that the promise having respect to all Christ's true servants, its fulfilment must be delayed till the number of the elect is completed, the whole Israel of God gathered into one. It seems long to us, the time needful for the accomplishment of this great object. But what is it to Him, who is from everlasting to everlasting? "Beloved," says St. Peter, "Be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promises, as some men count slackness." No doubt the faith of the ancient Church was tried by the long delay in the fulfilment of the promise of the first coming of the Messiah. But in due time the fulfilment came. And so the Church now is tried in respect of the second coming of the Lord. The lapse of eighteen centuries has shewn how mistaken were the views of those early converts, who hoped to be witnesses of it themselves before they died. One generation of believers has passed away after another, the Church has proved all vicissitudes of fortune, and been visited alike with prosperity and adversity. Still does she wait the second coming of her great Lord. Nor shall she wait in vain. When the plan of Providence is completed, when the number of the redeemed is made up, when all the sheep of Christ have been gathered into the fold, there shall appear in heaven the sign of the Son of man. Then shall

the blessed hope be fulfilled. Then will the glorious appearing take place, to which the saints of each successive age looked forward with devout and confident expectation, and they, whose lives were hid with Christ in God here, shall rise and reign with Him in glory. With Him,—observe, it is said, that union with Christ, that being with Him,—whatever be the external glory of the dwelling place of the redeemed, and however it be suited to the tastes of its inhabitants—that is to be its great and highest charm. Such Jesus knew to be the feeling of the disciples who were gathered round, in these last moments of his life on earth. And it is the feeling still of all believers. Him having not seen they love. Apart from him, there could be no heaven for them. This is heaven, to be with him, and as far as the capacities of our nature admits, to be like him.

Is this thy feeling, O professing Christian? Does thy heart thus go forth in love to Him who was the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief? Dost thou see God in him? and man, too, in the original purity of his nature? Art thou willing to be his now? Hast thou given thy soul into his keeping? Art thou his willing servant? Wouldst thou have thy will brought into conformity with his? Is this the burden of thy prayer, to be so conformed to him now, that thou mayest be meet for being with him for ever? Then is Christ doing a work in thee, as well as for thee. He hath gone to prepare a place for thee. But by his promised Spirit, present in thy soul, he is also preparing thee for the place.

This is a work of which it behoves us all to be conscious. What Christ is doing in the glory to which he is now exalted; what, in some distant region of space, in which he may be causing a new heaven and a new earth to become a meet abode for the family of the redeemed; whatever, in short, he is doing in the preparation of the place, we can but imperfectly conceive of. Nor is more perfect understanding

necessary. The interests of believers are safe in Christ's hands, and what they know not now they shall know hereafter. But of what Christ by His Spirit is doing within us, we should have knowledge. It is not place or circumstances, let us remember, which ensures happiness, however favourable or excellent these be in themselves, but the suitableness of our disposition to them, the conformity between them and our tempers and desires. And so while Christ prepares a place for his followers, he does also prepare them for the place, working in them, so that there shall be a congruity between the two, a suitableness in the one to minister to the happiness of the other. Now, much of the future dwelling-place of the saints is hid from us. It is indeed but little we know of it. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive it. But this we know, it is a place of pure and perfect holiness. In the new heaven and new earth dwelleth righteousness. Christ is there, and nothing entereth that defileth. And so it behoves, that we become holy and Christ-like, or heaven can be no heaven to us. And Christ's work of making his people holy by his Spirit, they should be daily conscious of. Growing humbleness of mind, growing trust in the gracious promises of God, growing meekness of temper, growing submission to the Divine will, growing delight in exercises of piety and works of charity, these are tokens and results of the work. Oh, let us seek for them, and pray for them. What matters it that Christ prepares a place, resplendent beyond all our present conception, with the glory of the Divine workmanship. It will not be a place for us, unless we be inwardly prepared for it.

XXII.

THE WILL OF CHRIST THAT HIS PEOPLE BE WITH HIM.

ST. JOHN XVII-24.

*Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me, where I am ;
that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me.*

IT was one part of the work of our blessed Lord upon the earth, to set before his followers an example of all righteousness, and by the exercise of every right disposition towards God and man, to shew, of how much that is excellent and lovely the nature of man is capable ; and this part of his work he did so accomplish, that his is the only perfect character on record, and in their spirit and essence, all virtues proper to men appear, as the occasion called for in the life of him who was holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners. Among these virtues, the devotional temper, which leads the soul to have converse and communion with God, could not fail to be present. And so, in the midst of his life of active beneficence, we find it said of him, that "he was alone praying," that "he went up into a mountain apart to pray," and "of his continuing all night in prayer to God." Towards the end of his life on earth, and as his work was drawing to its bitter close, we have some of his very words of prayer recorded, and they are singularly suggestive, both of the divine excellence of his character, and of the marvellous union in him of the human and the divine. In some of these, it is the human element which is most conspicuous, as when in the prospect of that season which he called himself, "the hour and the power of darkness," he said, as we have it in the twelfth chapter of St. John, "Now is my soul troubled and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour," and

again, and still more remarkably, when in his agony in the garden, "he fell upon his face, and prayed, saying, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Undoubtedly it is the apprehension and the anguish of a human spirit, which is to be discerned in these words of imploring earnestness, as it is equally, the endurance, the magnanimity, the resigned submission of a human spirit, which appear in the words which on either occasion followed the prayer. "But for this cause, came I to this hour." "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." "If this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." In this prayer again, in which there is given us most insight into the inner nature of Jesus and his relation with God, while, of course, from the very fact of its being prayer at all the human element appears, yet it is scarcely possible, that we should not be impressed with the greater presence of the Divine. There is throughout it the sublime composure of one, who, in addressing the Father, is conscious of an altogether peculiar relation to him, feels that he is one with him, having a common nature and having been the object of his love "before the foundation of the world." He speaks of a glory which he had with the Father "before the world was." He speaks of a work, which in the pre-existent state, he had given him to do and which was now finished. He speaks of those who had believed in him, that he was sent of God; and of those, who in after time should believe in him through their word, and says he had given them glory, "the glory which thou hast given me, I have given them." In all this, there is token of the higher nature of Jesus, and most of all is it so, in the text, when as conscious of the perfect unity of purpose between him and the Father, speaking less with words of entreaty than of authority, he says, "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me, where I am."

In considering these words of our blessed Lord, what

does perhaps first strike us is, that there is a people given to Christ, a special people, given in the destination of the Father, and obviously, that they may be sanctified and saved,—an act thus of divine grace and love, to which our Lord often refers, speaking both of the gift, and of the certainty of the ultimate safety of those given. As when he said, “All that the Father giveth to me, shall come to me ;” and again, “This is the Father’s will, that of all which he hath given I should lose nothing ;” and again, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.” Nor does he, of whom it is said, that as the Father knoweth him, so he knoweth the Father, whose knowledge therefore, of the divine procedure, and of all that constitutes the reason for such procedure, was a perfect knowledge, ever express dissatisfaction with what he thus affirms, as if the gift were unnecessarily limited or might have been extended to all. Yet, no doubt, to us poor children of mortality, who see so short a way into the purposes of the divine government, and are so little capable of judging why one method of procedure should be adopted rather than another, this very act of divine grace and love is suggestive of inscrutable mystery. For it raises the question, why were not all given to him—a question involving difficulties, which it is impossible to solve or to clear away ; a question, however, which not Christ’s words only, but actual facts against which we may not shut our eyes, suggest, for no one can think that all are given to Christ, while so many openly reject him, and so many more reject him practically, neither receiving his word nor submitting themselves to his will. But this question must be left in abeyance. It is not given to us or to our children to understand the deep things of God. It be-

hoves the child to have trust in the Father's wisdom. Our part is to think all right that God does, because he does it. Christ whose love was unspeakably greater and more tender than ours, complained not of the Father's will. Neither must we. Rather let us rejoice, that joined to the very word which testifieth, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me," is the comforting assurance, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." And, that as sealing up the vision and the prophecy, there are written these words of wide and generous invitation, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will let him take of the water of life freely." What obstacle to obedience, if obstacle there be, is in ourselves. And who may plead against God his own evil heart and wicked will?

But, secondly, in considering the words of our Lord in the text, it readily occurs to ask, how are Christ's to be known, they whom the Father hath given to Christ. And this raises the double question, how may they, who are Christ's, know it of themselves, and how may this be known of them by others.

Now, in respect of the first of these questions. No man reads his own name in the book of Scripture, as one of those given to Christ. Neither can any man ascend up into heaven to read his name in the book of life. Yet God, who has access to all hearts, can reveal it to his children, and does so reveal it, that they cannot choose but know and feel it. Still can it be said of a true believer, "Flesh and blood have not revealed it unto thee, but my Father, which is in heaven." To the soul, to which grace is given to apprehend clearly the freeness and fulness of the salvation that is in Christ and that is offered in the Gospel, to the soul humbly accepting that offer, to the soul hearing with faith the invitation to come to Christ, and that comes just as it is, without one plea, but that for it the blood of

Christ was shed, there is given such sense of divine love, there is so imparted of the peace of God which passeth understanding, that it cannot but know and acknowledge its adoption into the family of God, and its actual participation of the privileges of his children. And so that believing soul can say : By grace I am saved, I know that my Redeemer liveth. I know, whom I have believed. Nothing shall separate me from the love of God. And it has inward peace, everlasting consolation and good hope.

And then in respect of the second question, How may this special relation to Christ be discerned by others? It is by the same way in which, to a certain extent, it is confirmed to the believer himself. And that is by the presence of holy tempers and dispositions, such as lead to holy living, and such as the Scriptures declare to be the fruit of the working of the Spirit of God in the soul. If there be knowledge of divine truth ; if there be the unfaltering expression of trust, humble yet confident, in the mercy of God flowing through the channel of the Saviour's mediation ; if there be token of genuine and undissembled humility ; if there be the manifestation of a patient and submissive spirit, that murmurs not at any sufferings which may have to be borne, but rather discerns grace and mercy in the providential dealings of God, however for the time grievous ; if there is readiness to forgive, as knowing how much there needs to be forgiven ; if there is the appreciation of good in those in whom there are tokens of spiritual life ; if there is overflowing love to all ; if in the conduct of life, or in the conflict with death, such be the state, such the dispositions of the soul, are not these the letters with which Christ writes his new name upon his servants, and by which they become his Epistle known and read of all men. We reject Scripture, and refuse the encouragement and consolation it is designed to give, if we own not these as the handwriting of God, if we discern not in these the testimony of the Spirit, bearing witness

of those who have them, that they are the children of God, and of those whom the Father hath given to Christ. "He that believeth in the Son of God," says the Apostle, "hath the witness in himself." And "hereby know we, that we dwell in God, and God in us, because He hath given us of his Spirit."

In the third place, while considering the words of our Lord in the text, we may take into account his purpose, with respect to those who have been given him by the Father. It is, that they be with him where he is. And this is in conformity with what he says elsewhere in the same Gospel: "If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be." In respect of which purpose of Christ, be it remarked: First, that it did not, when expressed by his immediate disciples, and it does not now, when bearing on those, who through the word of his disciples have believed in his name, imply their immediate removal from this life. The disciples, as the chosen Apostles of the faith, had a work to do in the world, even to carry the Gospel of Christ over the world, and everywhere to bear witness to his resurrection from the dead. And like all other Christian people, they had a work of sanctification to be wrought in them, by the Divine Spirit, and through the dealings of Providence, without which they could not be prepared to be with Christ in his glory, and yet, which in his administration of grace, God causes not ordinarily to be wrought at once, but through the alternations of a spiritual conflict, in which the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, out of which the believer comes at last conqueror and more than conqueror. And as it was with them, so it is with all who are given to the Father. They have to be disciplined by the divine Providence. They have to be purified by the grace and Spirit of God, and so a meetness be wrought in them for their ultimate destination. And they have a work, too, in the world, in discharging the

duties of which they can honour Christ and make advancement themselves in the divine life. But in due time the inward work is accomplished, and when God sees meet, the outward work too comes to an end. And then of this one, and that one, who has been washed and justified and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God, Christ says, as in the text, Father I will that he, or she, whom thou hast given to me, be with me where I am, and the believing soul so spoken of, departs to be with Christ. To be with Christ *now*, that is not merely at the resurrection, but on its departure from the body. To be "absent from the body" was equivalent with St. Paul, in the case of Christian believers, to being "present with the Lord." And again "to depart," that is from this world, was, he said, "to be with Christ." It is inconceivable to some that there should be life, thought, feeling, apart from the body, which has fallen into corruption and decay. But some material organization, if necessary as it seems, there may very well be conceived to be, in the interval that elapses between death and the repairs and restoration of the body at the resurrection. And some such thing seems to be intimated by St. Paul in the fifth chapter of his second Epistle to the Corinthians when he speaks of the soul earnestly desiring "to be clothed upon with its house which is from heaven." Is not this some dwelling place of the soul, prepared for it till the resurrection, in virtue of which it will not be found naked, but clothed upon and capable of being joined with Christ, in the glory to which he is now exalted. However this be, the soul of the believer will be with him where he is, and with the believers that have cast off the burden of the flesh. "To-day," said our Lord to the penitent thief on the cross, "To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise." What reason can there be for thinking, that it was to be different with him from others?

Then again, in the third place, in respect of Christ's

purpose expressed in the text, it shall be fully and perfectly carried out, at his second and glorious coming. For then not only shall the spirit be with Christ, disembodied, or rather it would seem according to St. Paul, not in a state of nakedness, but clothed upon and dwelling in a house from heaven, suited to its circumstances in the intermediate state between death and the resurrection, but the whole renewed and redeemed nature shall be with Christ, the body formed and fashioned like unto his glorious body, and soul and spirit, bearing the image of God, in which man was at first created. Then, when

Those bodies that corrupted fell
 Shall incorrupted rise,
 And mortal forms shall spring to life
 Immortal in the skies—

the last enemy shall be destroyed, and death shall be swallowed up in victory.

In the fourth place, while considering the words of our Lord in the text, we may take into account the result of the carrying out of his purpose therein expressed. And that result is two-fold. It may be considered in respect of those who remain, and in respect of those who depart.

And first, in respect of those who remain. They who are given to Christ to be his, his in a special and peculiar sense, his as the object of tender love or as the subject of continual provision and care, given to him, to be his inalienably and for ever, have in a lower sense been also given to others; a sense which while vastly lower and less momentous in its consequence, does yet imply and produce, if not love like Christ's love, yet such love as men can feel, and love such as grapples as with hooks of steel one child of man unto another; and no doubt, when Christ's loving purpose comes to be carried out, it rends and saddens many a heart. Death is a terrible visitant even when he comes in subjection to Christ, and to carry out his holy and loving purpose. It is a bitter trial, when the daughter of a tender and unbroken affection is laid in the

dust ; when a wife and mother, loving and beloved, leaves a desolate husband and a weeping family ; or when the bright intellect, the warm affection, the noble instincts of early manhood, strong for the world's work and for God's work in the world, pass away and are lost, as far as all life here is concerned, in the silence of the grave. But such is the rule, under the government of God, which will have no union here of hearts which finds not here an end. And we must not murmur at it. We need to be impressively taught that this is not our rest. We need to be made to look for better things than the world can give, and to establish connections and relationships, which shall outlive the shock of death and the silence of the grave. Christ's way of taking to himself, to be where he is those who have been given to him of the Father, is not wanting in wisdom or in love. Nay, it is in tender love for those who remain, and in wise provision for their good, that it has been chosen ; and good does and will come out of it, how grievous soever it be for the time, if they, who suffer under it, are moved to be followers of those who through faith and patience are now inheriting the promises, and to cleave to that blessed Lord and Saviour, who having loved his own from the beginning loves them unto the end.

But in the second place, and as what chiefly concerns us to consider, is the result, the result, that is of Christ's carrying out the purpose expressed in the text to those who depart. And first, they are with Christ. Now how much of meaning, comfortable and glorious meaning, is implied in that short and simple statement. It does not indeed tell us, where or how glorious that heaven to which the risen Saviour ascended ; where or how glorious that Paradise to which he bore from earth the dying felon by his side ; but there is implied in it all imaginable provision for the soul's honour and happiness. Where in earthly society are we inclined to look for such ample provision ? Is it not to the palaces of kings, in which all that wealth or power

can do to gratify the tastes of men and fill up the measure of their enjoyment, are at command ? But what are earthly kings or courts to Him, who is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who has all sources of every pleasure that is refined and pure at his disposal, and whose loving nature will dispose him to throw them open unto all, whose happy destiny is to be with Him. Can it be once supposed, that the words of the Psalmist should fail to apply to the place, where is the personal presence of Christ ? "In thy presence there is fulness of joy : at thy right hand there are pleasures evermore."

Again, they shall behold, they do behold, the glory of Christ. That they may do so, is indeed the reason specified why they should be with Christ. "Father I will that they whom thou hast given to me be with me where I am ; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me." They behold the glorious body which Christ has taken with him into heaven. They behold the glorious hosts, by which he is surrounded. Nay, and the material glory of that place of blessedness, may be such as nothing in this lower region of the divine works can enable us to have any adequate conception of. While doubtless, there will be given to them a far clearer apprehension of the glory of Christ, both in work of creation and of redemption, there shall ever be matter for study, matter to call forth admiration, to bow the soul in reverential worship, to deepen affiance to Christ, and to quicken the sentiments of gratitude and love.

But still further, it is not only given to them to see, either as a matter of sense or of understanding, the glory of Christ. It will be given them to participate in that glory. To see, or to behold, is sometimes used with that latitude of meaning in Scripture. Thus it is said by our Lord, in the third chapter of this Gospel, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God," that is evidently, he cannot participate in its glory

and blessedness ; and so it may be understood to be used here. Besides, it is expressly stated in a former verse of this chapter : " The glory which thou hast given me, I have given them, that they may be one, as we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one,"—one, that is, in holy feeling and holy principle. In being with Christ then, the soul of the believer shares in the honour and dignity that have been accorded to him.

Lastly, we cannot rightly judge of Christ's glory, without taking into account his supreme and perfect moral excellence. That indeed constitutes his supreme and highest glory—the glory to which the redeemed and renewed soul will be most alive, and which it will regard with ever growing admiration and love. Now such study and love of moral excellence has a special effect upon the soul. There is thereby wrought in it a moral resemblance to the excellence which it loves and contemplates ; a resemblance ever growing, as the study is pursued, and the opportunities for pursuing it are ample. Such result, even the contemplation of Christ, which is possible for the believer in this life, does to a certain extent accomplish ; so that " beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." And such result shall be yet more extensively and effectually accomplished, when the renewed spirit shall have ampler opportunities of knowing and contemplating Christ, and greater desire to take advantage of them. So says the beloved disciple, " It doth not yet appear what we, the sons of God, shall be, but we know, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Likeness to Christ then, likeness to Him in that which constitutes his chiefest glory, likeness too ever growing, that is one result of being with Him where He is. And can a nobler or more glorious, enter into the contemplation or the desires of any soul, which has learned rightly to distinguish between things that differ, and to approve most

that which is 'most excellent. Ah, there is no cause to mourn those, whom we have reason to hope and to believe that Christ has taken to be with Him where He is. It is well with them, and it will be well with us if we seek to follow them. They are beholding Christ's glory. They, in the sphere allotted them, are doing Christ's work, and are blessed in the doing of it. Their sun doth no more go down neither doth their moon withdraw itself; for the Lord is their everlasting light, and the days of pain and sorrow and suffering are forever ended.

And now, I would conclude with the remark that it is in the proportion we have learned to turn our minds to the contemplation of Christ, that we advance in the divine life. In Christ, the Gospel is, as it were, embodied—the divine love which it reveals, the human duty which it enjoins, the gracious promises it makes. There is much no doubt, in connection with the Gospel, which may legitimately form subject of the Christian's thoughts. There are the credentials of Christ's mission; there is the abstract truth he taught; there is the establishment and order of his Church; there are the predictions of its fortunes, and of the second coming of its Lord; there are the histories and experiences of the saints. But ever in its hour of need, and when is it not an hour of need, it is to the personal Saviour, the earnest and believing soul cleaves, and from him it obtains the grace and strength which it requires. Nothing, in the time of trouble, must stand between the soul and Christ. "Lord," it says, "to whom can I go, but unto Thee. Thou alone hast the words of eternal life." "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love thee." "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy upon me." "Without thee I cannot live, without thee I dare not die." Why is it that in his trouble, the believer does, as if by natural instinct, turn to the discourses and prayer of Christ, from which the text is taken? It

is because Christ, the living, loving Saviour, stands so prominent through them, and it is, as if through the intervening centuries, the words of Divine consolation still reached the believer's ear, in those tones of tenderness with which they were uttered at the first. There is an old story of a great conqueror, who asked a captive king at what price he would redeem the liberty of his wife. At the price of my own life, was the answer. The conqueror kindly released them both, with honours and presents. And when afterwards the conversation turned on him who had been so generous, and the question was asked of the wife, what she thought of him, "I did not observe him" said she. "Not observe him, on what then was your attention fixed?" On that dear and generous man, said she, "who offered his own life as the price of mine." It is thus that the believer's eye should be fixed on Christ on Him, who not only offered but gave his life a ransom for us, so fixed, as to exclude the contemplation of meaner objects, that might win the soul from its duty and allegiance to Him who is its King and Lord.

And so it behoves the believer to set forth Christ to his children, and to all over whom he has influence, and plainly to teach the way of acceptance by him. It is much to have clear views of divine truth, when the time comes that there is a felt need of that truth. Fill the water pots with water. What knowest thou, O Christian, how soon it may please Christ to turn the water into wine? Give them knowledge of God and of His Son. What knowest thou, how soon it may become that saving knowledge which is life eternal?

Specially it is our duty from this place, so to set forth Christ, and to teach the way of acceptance, to those who know it not or know it but dimly and imperfectly. To those who are in such plight, let St. Paul himself, the great Apostle, be the preacher now, and in the very words he addressed of old to the Roman Church. Thus you have it in the tenth chapter of his Epistle.

“Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, that the man which doeth those things shall live by them.” No doubt this is a divine rule, firm and stable as every word of God is. Take the comfort of it, O man, whosoever thou art, whose conscience bears thee witness, that thou hast kept all the law at all times. But if this thou canst not claim to have done, then for thy comfort learn thou this:—

“The righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise: If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” Christ apprehended by faith, stands instead of that righteousness of the law, which thou hast not rendered. “Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed.”

XXIII.
THE REVELATION AND EXECUTION OF
JUDGMENT.

ROMANS II.5. ST. JUDE XIV.15.

The day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

And Enoch also, seventh from Adam, prophesied of these saying, Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them, of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

A great English poet has spoken in emphatic terms, of the strange extremes which meet in the nature of man. It may be in consequence of these extremes, as one or the other predominates, the worm or the God, that men form judgments so discordant on the great subjects of religion. The being and nature of God, for example. There are polytheists, who think there are Gods many and Lords many ; atheists, who say in their heart there is no God ; and pantheists, who hold all persons and all things to be parts of the divine and omnipresent nature. The Bible, alike in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, differs from these and condemns them. In opposition to the atheist, it teaches that there is a God. In opposition to the polytheist, it teaches there is but one God, the living and true God. In opposition to the pantheist, it teaches there is a personal God, distinct from the matter of the universe or the minds which inhabit it. And its teaching accords with the conclusions of the highest reason, with the promptings of conscience and the inherent tendencies of thought and feeling in the human spirit. The mind at all thoughtful or enlightened, revolts from the dreary blank of atheism. And the heart, at all impressed and moved by the contemplation of the conditions and destiny of

man, feels its need of, and craves to rest on, fatherly love, in one Infinite and Almighty.

God then, one God, a personal God, with whom, as created and dependent beings we have all to do, and to do always, that is the first lesson of the Christian theology. Its next is to describe to us, as far as that may be possible or necessary, the character of the great Being, towards whom we stand in so close and enduring a relation ; to make us comprehend, in some measure, the principles on which he acts and the authority which he exercises ; to give us, in short, such insight, as in our darkness, and ignorance, and sinful state we need, into the mind and will of God. And here it has to suit itself to our weak powers and capacities of thought and understanding, taking what we know and are familiar with in man from our own consciousness and observation of others, as the groundwork of its representation of God, and using language, in strictness applicable only to man, in respect of the nature, and attributes, and modes of thinking and acting of the Spiritual and Infinite One. Thus it becomes, in the view which it gives of God, to a certain extent what has been called anthropopathic, attributing, that is to God, the affections and passions, the faculties, bodily and mental, which belong to men. It becomes so, not theoretically, or as laying down truth to be received according to the letter in which it is expressed, for the doctrine which it propounds is, that God is a Spirit, filling heaven and earth with his presence. "To whom," it says, "will ye liken God, or what likeness will ye compare unto him. His ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts. As the heavens are high above the earth, so are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts." But it becomes so, not theoretically and in principle, but as a matter of convenience and necessity, that it may give impression or apprehension, at all vivid or efficacious, of divine attributes and divine agency. And so we read

of the right hand of God, and the mighty arm of God ; so we read of God grieving, repenting, and being angry ; so we read of God, under the names and designations proper to the relations in which men stand to one another, as Father, Master, King, Lawgiver, Judge. In each of those, notions of God, true and important, are communicated ; each of them involves and strongly teaches his personality—his existence that is distinct from other beings, while teaching also something of that personality—his power, his holiness, or his peculiar exercise of authority over us his creatures.

But it would obviously be a very great mistake, if we did take such expressions in their simple and literal meaning, and attach to them the same ideas in regard of God, which we attach to them in regard of man ; if we did, for example, attribute to God the bodily frame of man, instead of the attribute of power involved in the expression of the hand or the arm, as applied to Him ; or if we did suppose him subject to the excitement and turbulence of human passions ; or if we did account his relation to us, precisely, and absolutely, and in all respects the same, as that indicated by the names applied to the relations between one man and another. There is that in God, of which these and similar expressions are intended to give us clear and vivid apprehensions. But there is that also which that Scripture in its teaching of God may be consistent with itself and not infringe on its own sublime declarations of the spirituality and unchangeable perfection of the Divine nature, must be held and used only to suit our capacities of knowing and apprehending spiritual truth.

It is thus we are constrained to distinguish among the ideas which even Scripture words convey if strictly understood, when we read of God, and the doings of God. Admitting what is no doubt true, that the root of all knowledge we have of God is in ourselves ; and that

figurative language drawn from the bodily frame, the mental habitudes, and the social relations of man, is well fitted to give vivid apprehensions of truth concerning God, needful to be known, we must be on our guard, as the Scripture indeed warns us to be, against thinking of God as altogether such an one as ourselves. Though there is likeness between God and us, and but for this, for that we are his offspring, and were made at first after his image, we could never have had knowledge or apprehension of God at all, yet we are ever to remember, that the conditions of his being and the manner of his acting are unspeakably different from ours; and so the language applied to our condition of being, can only have as applied to his, a general, not a special or complete identity of meaning.

To illustrate this, we may consider, what is said in various parts of the Scriptures concerning God, as the Creator of all things: "The sea is his," says the Psalmist, "and he made it; his hands formed the dry land." And in the prophecies of Isaiah, Jehovah is represented as saying: "I am the Lord that maketh all things. I have made the earth and created man upon it. Mine hand hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens." And so there are vast variety of other passages, in which expressions are used, analogous to those which man employs, in regard of what he makes for use, or ornament, or enjoyment, and they are applied to the creating work of God. There is an analogy obvious enough. In both cases, the work of God and the work of man, there is the previously existing type in the mind of that which is to be produced, and there is the actual bringing into existence of the thing so conceived in the mind. We read the thoughts of the mind of God in his works, as we do the thoughts that have been in the mind of man by his works. Yet how different is God's working from man's working. Not merely in that God creates, while man makes. God, that is, makes out of nothing, while man can only dispose

differently the materials already made to his hand. Not merely, in the magnificent scale of the works of God, beside which the noblest of the works of man sink into insignificance, but in the whole process. With man, there is the known and experienced labour of inventing, improving to the extent of capacity with which he who works is endowed, perfecting the mental type and image of what is to be done. With man, there is the visible labour of arranging into the forms which fancy has contrived, the materials of which he is in possession. Whereas God's work is without labour and without visible interposition. It is a magnificent conception, laying the foundations of the earth, and spanning the arch of heaven. But it is yet more sublime to think of the earth being hung on nothing, and the arch of heaven, with all its starry hosts, formed with no voice speaking and no hand appearing ; and men have to trace the Designer and the Worker, not from any visible labour in the contrivance or the execution of the work, but from the profound wisdom manifested in the work itself. So we see there is an analogy between God's making and man's making, such as renders suitable, and suggestive, and impressive, the use of the same word to both ; and yet God's making is a very different thing from man's making, and we must guard against the use of the word in common to both, making us imagine the identity of both.

To take another example by way of illustrating the same thing, let us consider how God punishes the violation of his laws. God is represented in the Scriptures as a Governor laying down laws, and affixing penalties to the violation of these laws, which penalties he inflicts in the case of transgressors. Now this is done under earthly governments. But under earthly governments, there are distinct offices for these things, and visible execution of these offices. As well as a governor, or legislative authority, which makes the law, and a judge who declares the law, and a jury, it may be, who ascertain the guilt of the individual, there is an

executioner of the sentence of the law. And the infliction or penalty of the law is something from without, laid on the criminal to bear or to do. Now God, the moral Governor of the universe, does also punish. But his way and method of punishment is very different. His voice is not heard. His hand is not seen. He has no special officers to inflict on the sinner the threatened vengeance. Yet punishment under his government is a real and certain thing, more real, more certain, more unavoidable, than under any earthly government. There is provision for it made in the constitution of man's nature, and in the constitution of human society—provision which shall appear more fully, when obstacles, accidental to the present state of things—a state of probation and of discipline—shall have been removed, as they will be in a future life. Sin in a man is itself the serpent that will sting him, and so sting as to punish the sin. It works its own punishment in numberless ways. It works it, not without a real interference on the part of God, the great moral Governor of the universe; his interference is in the ordaining and upholding continually the constitution of things under which this takes place, yet without a visible or sensible interference. Thus while both God and man punish, and there is that in what both do, which renders the word suitable in the case of both—affixing pain to certain actions of which such pain is the known penalty—yet there is a vast difference in the way in which the thing is done, and the same word used of both must not lead us to suppose that there is in all respects an identity in both.

Now it is so, as I think, with what Scripture tells us of the general judgment. It speaks of it after the manner of men, and after the order and fashion of earthly tribunals. There is used, though in majestic terms corresponding to the greatness of the event, the language and the ceremonial of courts of justice. There is set a great white throne. Jesus the God man, Judge of men and angels, sits thereon. The dead, small and great, are sisted before

the judgment seat of God. The sea gives up the dead which have been slumbering in its dark caverns. Death and the grave surrender their numberless victims. All are to be judged according to their works. Then the books are opened, and the dead are judged out of those things which are written in the books. Then the sentence is pronounced, and each proceeds to his destined punishment or reward. Now it would, as it seems to me, be judging of God's ways by man's ways, and not only by man's ways, but by man's necessities, to suppose this as other than in detail figurative, and not as being only in substance real and true. In the case of man's judging and God's judging, as in the case of man's making and God's making, or man's punishing and God's punishing, there is what is identical or strictly analogous, and there is what is not so. Man, in judging of a fellow man needs to learn the charge preferred against him, to hear the evidence adduced to support the charge, to weigh the nature and strength of that evidence, to consider the amount of guilt contracted, of evil against individuals and against the general interests of society, which has been done, and the amount of punishment which the law affixes to the crime, or which the good of society requires to be inflicted. All this, to be done well or wisely, so as to do justice to the accused and justice to the public interest, must be done slowly and solemnly, according to prescribed forms, and with a ceremonial fitted to strike the imagination. But what man needs to do in judging, God does not need to do. It is not necessary to his coming to a right conclusion, to read the books in which the deeds of those before his tribunal are recorded, or to weigh the character of their deeds. The whole form and ceremonial of human judgment seats and the whole process of judgment at them, are utterly out of place with one to whom the secrets of all hearts are known, to whom the character and deserts of every individual appear clear as the light of day ; whose decision in the case

of each before his bar has been formed, and cannot be in aught altered, by any procedure before his tribunal. That which is essential to consider under all figurative language in regard of the judgment, and which is analagous to the doings of earthly tribunals is, that God judges all, will declare his judgment, and cause the sentence to be carried into execution.

We speak of the day when Christ shall suddenly come, and come, as we are told, unexpectedly, even as a thief in the night; the day which is to be ushered in with some such great convulsions and revolutions in the material universe, as appear on other occasions to have happened, under the government and by the interposition of the Almighty; the day, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burned up; the day when all who are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God and come forth. We speak of that day as the day of judgment. And so, no doubt, it is called in the Scriptures. Our Saviour speaks of the fate of the cities which rejected him in the day of judgment. St. Peter speaks of those who are reserved unto fire on the day of judgment. St. John speaks of having love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment. But judgment does not always mean trial, or the day of judgment the day of judging. Judgment means pronouncing sentence, inflicting punishment. "The Lord cometh" says St. Jude, "to execute judgment. And here in the text, St. Paul speaks of it "as the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

It is the day of life which is to us the day of judgment, in the sense of judging, in the sense of trial. Human judges are not cognizant of the actions of those who are tried before them till they are explained. And long periods may intervene, between the commission of a crime and

their forming a judgment concerning it, or him who has committed it. But God sits on the throne of judgment continually. He knows every thought, every desire, every word, every action, of every one of his creatures. He is intimately acquainted with all the circumstances in which each of his creatures thinks and acts, intimately acquainted with all the circumstances, which do either tend to palliate or to aggravate the guilt of their sins. No element necessary to a judgment entirely according to the truth of things is ever wanting to him. And he does judge continually. As he sees all, so he judges all, every moment. Think not, O sinner, that the time of thy trial is yet long ages off. Thou art on thy trial now. God is judging thee now, judging thy every action, judging thee every moment. That which is in various places called by way of eminence, the day of the Lord, the day of judgment, the judgment of the great day, is what St. Paul speaks of in the text, "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God ; or what St. Jude speaks of when he says, "Behold the Lord cometh, with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds, which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

First, it is the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God ; the day when that judgment which God is ever making of us shall be made known to us ; the day when we shall be constrained to think of ourselves, and of the tenor of our affections and conduct through life, as God thinks of them. These, men judge when they do judge them at all, when they do bring them to any moral standard to estimate their moral character and deserts, which very much they fail to do, by the world's standard of right, not that of God or of his word ; and even in the application of that imperfect standard they are biassed and blinded by self love. It serves

to quicken their insight and apprehension of evil existing in themselves, when they are made aware of the judgment passed on them by another, free from such disturbing influences, the more if they look up to that other as a man of wisdom and principle. But the judgment of man can extend but a short way into the motives and principles of human action. Whereas God's judgment extends to all, both in the inner and outer life, and is the judgment, in every case, of perfect righteousness.

To the revelation to each of this judgment, to the making us to feel what that judgment is, it would seem that all a man's life should be made to pass before him, all thoughts that have been in his mind, all desires, all affections, all doings, everything which combined constitutes character. The book of memory would need to be opened, not blurred and blotted and in numberless pages effaced, as when we recur to it we find it now, but the whole record of life perfect and entire. And such a book there would seem to be. There are indications of a provision in the constitution of our nature, for renewing and rendering plain and intelligible those blotted or even effaced pages in the book of memory ; in other words, for bringing to remembrance thoughts, feelings, actions, that had long been forgotten, and which had seemed to have passed into full and final oblivion. Every one knows how an unconscious look, a passing word, a commonplace remark, no wise intended to have such effect by him who made it, may, with electric quickness and by some inexplicable association which it is impossible to trace, call to remembrance a train of circumstances and events, of thoughts and feelings in our past history, which had been forgotten for years and years, and no memory of which it seemed had ever been preserved. And drowning persons, when rescued and restored to consciousness, have told, how in a moment of time, all life seemed to pass before the mind, with the freshness and vividness of a present reality.

Is there nothing, absolutely nothing, really forgotten so forgotten, as that there exists not means and appliances for reviving, and recalling it, and bringing it before the mind? It should seem so. It is not merely that we can resort to the Almighty power of God, and say he can make us remember. But it is that the Almighty power of God has already made provision for it. And is not one purpose of such provision, that all that constitutes life may again be recorded, to be judged—not by God only—but by ourselves, in the light of his judgment revealed to us in that great day when the Lord shall come.

The thought of such judgment of ourselves, in the light of God's righteous and perfect judgment, judgment that is according to strict principle, of all life accurately and vividly recalled, brings us to the second characteristic of what is called the day of the Lord, the great day. That is not merely the revelation of judgment, but the execution of judgment. "Behold, the Lord will come, with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all." For such revelation of God's righteous judgment, leading and constraining to like judgment, is certainly the beginning of the execution of judgment. Observe how St. Jude goes on to explain what the Lord will do when he comes to execute judgment. He is to convince—to convince all that are ungodly among men, of all their ungodly deeds, which they have committed and of all their hard speeches, which ungodly sinners have spoken against him. What is that but to give the apprehension of the guilt of their sins—all their sins—to make them see them, and think of them, and judge them, as God thinks of them and judges them? We do not say that this is all the punishment of the impenitent. For what but unmixed misery must be the result of sinful passions reigning in the soul, passions raging, yet ungratified and unrestrained. But assuredly it is a large portion of that punishment. Does any one venture to make light of such

a punishment? Why even in this world, we know and see the agony springing from a sense of guilt, from remorse of conscience, it is often greater than a man can bear. Oh, but how unspeakably more bitter it may be made, by a better knowledge and a more righteous principle of judgment. It needs only that effect be given to the provision in our nature for recalling past thoughts and actions, and in moral and righteous judgment of the sins of a whole life, as they come in hideous aggravation before the mind, there shall be a hell created within the sinner's bosom, in comparison with which all physical suffering shall seem light. By some slight yet all powerful agency, there may be disclosed to the lost soul hidden thoughts and deeds of iniquity, on which it had long ceased to look, but which now it must continue to regard with shame, and remorse, and bitter anguish for ever. A word, and all the hidden stores of memory shall be unlocked, and every base and shameful thought, every impure desire or indulgence, every action by which God's holy law was violated or God's image obscured or effaced in the soul, shall rise up, the terrible agents of divine vengeance on the sinner. It is this latent power in man of moral apprehension and moral judgment, called into exercise by the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, this convincing of ungodly sinners of their ungodly deeds, which can be done so imperfectly in this present life, but shall be done perfectly in the great day when the Lord shall come, which shall begin the execution of the divine judgment, and which if it stood alone would give emphasis to the words of the Apostle, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

And who shall not fall into his hands? Is there on earth, or of all who have been on the earth, who on the ground of a life which the judgment of God shall entirely approve, may hope to stand in the day when that judgment shall be revealed? None alas! not one. Yet

among the figurative books which shall, according to the revelation made to St. John, be opened on the great day, is one called the book of life, and from the condemnation of that day, only they shall be exempted whose names are written in it. And what is this book of life, and who are they who may hope that their names are written therein? It is called the Lamb's book of life, and it is the record of those, in all time, who have been washed, and justified, and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. It is the record of the followers of Jesus, those who have believed his word, confessed his name, trusted in his promises, walked in his steps. They shall be safe even in that day of terror. Nay, it shall be no day of terror to them. They will hail its arrival, for it is to them the commencement of the full blessedness of their nature. Oh, to have our names written in that book of life! But how shall that be done? Is not that book with Christ in heaven? Yes, but our receiving Christ, loving Christ, confessing Christ, writes our names in it. The pen may be on earth, while yet the book is in heaven; yea, and grace if we would have it, and would ask it, shall be given us from heaven, to enable us to write. In that book, some have their names already written. In that book, some are longing and praying to have them written, and be assured that they are. May God awaken and reclaim those wretched souls who think not of it, and who are drawing ever nearer to the revelation of a judgment, which will condemn them and make them condemn and execute judgment on themselves.

XXIV.

SELF EXAMINATION.

2 COR. XIII. 5.

Prove your own selves.

IT is said in the Scriptures that the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. By which we are to understand, not that they are absolutely or in all respects wiser, nor that they are wiser in respect of the choice they have made of an object to be attained, but that they are wiser in the selection and use of means for the attainment of that object. Their desire of the object which they have chosen is, very often, keener, more intense, more engrossing, than is the desire, though it be a nobler and better one, which is in the children of light. And that makes them more sharp-sighted to discern, and more prompt to use the exertions that are required. Thus the children of the world may often be set forth as models and examples to the children of light. And he is a happy, and must be an advanced Christian, whose conscience bears him witness, that in clear discernment of what needs to be done in the spiritual life for its strengthening and daily development, and in the zeal, activity and diligence which he manifests in doing what is thus needful, he rivals the children of the world, prosecuting their schemes of worldly pleasure or aggrandisement.

There is indeed a wisdom about worldly things, which almost all men have, but which seems to leave and to forsake them when spiritual things are concerned. Believers as well as unbelievers are, in one sense, children of the world. They are born in it; they live in it; they are occupied with its affairs; they mingle in its society; they are

affected by its fortunes ; they are constrained by necessity to engage actively in its business. All this they cannot help, nor should seek to help. The world is God's world, and by God's gift it is the believer's world, too, made his so as to minister, if he orders himself aright, both to his temporal comfort and his spiritual well-being. But what I would now observe is, that not only do they who are in the Scripture sense of the words children of the world, men, t'at is, living to the world alone and aspiring to nothing higher or better—not only do they, in the management of their affairs act more wisely than the children of light, but the children of light themselves, in their relations to the world, act with a sagacity and zeal and appropriate activity and exertion, which they fail to manifest in their relation to the things that are unseen and spiritual. Thus their conduct in respect of the one, may properly be held up as a model, in respect of the other. And he, I may say as before, is a happy and must be an advanced Christian, whose conscience bears him witness, that he is as quick to discern and as prompt to use the means for the attainment of spiritual, as he is for the attainment of temporal things.

It is according to Scripture example, to set forth the wisdom and activity of men in all branches of human industry, for the admonishing, reproving, quickening, and guiding of men in regard of spiritual duties. The patient assiduity and daily labour of him who tills the ground and sows in hope of an earthly harvest, are held forth as examples to him, who is sowing to the spirit, in hope that of the spirit he shall reap life everlasting. The adventurous spirit of the merchant, and his labours for the gain he covets, are set forth as examples in the pursuit of that higher merchandise, which is better than the merchandise of silver and the gain thereof than fine gold. The courage and endurance of the soldier, in the conflicts of the world, are examples to him who fights, under a higher

standard, and with nobler hopes, the good fight of faith. Even the previous temperance and self-denial of the runner and wrestler in the famous games of ancient times, and their ardent efforts to reach the goal and gain the prize, are used to urge the Christian to exertion in the life of faith and godliness, to run with alacrity the race set before him, lest he should fail of the heavenly crown which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. So in innumerable instances, the labours of men under the prompting of worldly passions or the pressure of worldly necessities, are used to direct in regard of those labours of which the higher aim is to obtain spiritual and heavenly blessings.

In a community like ours, it is very natural to draw such lessons from the habits and practices of mercantile life ; shewing how such habits and practices may be advantageously transferred to the spiritual life ; how the good they accomplish in respect of things temporal sinks into insignificance, when compared with the good they may accomplish in respect of things spiritual and eternal ; and how the absence of them, is symptomatic of the weakness of religious principle or the want of spiritual discernment. Our commission is to speak of spiritual riches, not the deceitful mammon, which only deludes its votaries with promises which it cannot fulfil, but the true riches, which bring no sorrow with them, nay, but in which the soul's true happiness is found. Our commission is to set forth these riches as within reach, and to urge every soul to make exertions to attain them ; and to entreat and to exhort whosoever would be rich in this heavenly treasure, to bring into play all the sagacity, all the zeal, all the diligence, all the activity, which he may ever have manifested or seen others manifest, in pursuit of the gold that perisheth, in the pursuit of the riches which God will give him, to be to him a satisfying portion forever. The activity and zeal, which if not misapplied, are at least disproportioned to the end

in view when employed in the service of the world, are all reasonable and necessary, when called into exercise in respect of spiritual things. Emphatically did our Lord teach in the parable of the rich man, whose soul was required of him in the midst of his acquisitions and his self gratulations, the folly of those who "lay up treasure for themselves and are not rich towards God."

These remarks I make as preliminary to the mention of a practice in the mercantile, which it would be well that we did all follow, in the spiritual life. That is the merchant's practice at regular intervals, to review the whole state of his affairs, taking strict account of the gains he has made, the losses he has sustained, his liabilities to others, or the liabilities of others to him, and the change for the better or the worse, which, during any one such interval, the daily operations of business have made in his worldly circumstances. I believe no mercantile man disputes the wisdom and necessity of such a balancing of accounts from time to time, or the clear insight which it gives a man into the true state of his affairs. Without it, he goes on, either ignorant of the resources which he has at command and which he might turn to advantage, or reckless of the embarrassment and difficulties, which must speedily overtake him and bring him to ruin. The impressions which a man may have from one day to another, of the nature and result of the multiplied transactions in which he is engaged and by which his fortunes are all more or less affected, are nothing to be trusted, in comparison with that close searching investigation, which leaves nothing unconsidered, which ascertains the gain and the loss with precision, and gives to the conclusion arrived at, not the conviction or the wish of a sanguine, or the doubt and apprehension of a desponding temperament, but the certainty of an arithmetical calculation.

Now, this practice, prudential and necessary in temporal affairs, is it not wise to transfer to the things of the

spiritual life? In that life, if indeed we have entered on it at all, there are objects to be attained or lost. We may advance or we may go back. We may grow in clearness of spiritual discernment, or we may become blind to the apprehension of spiritual things. The truth may be more or less precious to us, the exercises of piety more or less agreeable to us. We may abound more in good works, or we may fall back into the listlessness and apathy of the world towards enterprises of benevolence and piety. Faith may become stronger or weaker, love be more or less ardent, the soul may aspire more or less to the things which are above at the right hand of God, where Christ sitteth. Likeness to Christ may be advancing, or likeness to the world that hated and crucified Him. Now, is a man to take no note how this work goes on, whether it tends one way or another, and to what extent it goes? Were it not wise, at periodic intervals, to compare, what as Christians we were, to what as Christians we are, to ascertain how we stand now, as compared with some certain period before, and learn whether we have been growing in spiritual riches, or sinking into the depths of spiritual poverty?

It is very true, we cannot try this matter with all the accuracy of a mercantile computation. We have neither so exact a record of what we were, nor so perfect a consciousness of what we are, as the merchant has in his books; and our comparison cannot have the completeness, nor the result of it the accuracy, of the balance which he makes in respect of temporal things. Memory may deceive us as to what we were. Self love may blind us as to what we are. But because our reckoning may not be perfect, are we not therefore to make it at all? If it do even approach the truth, were it not well that we should make it? Shall one period after another, of the short season allotted us to spend on earth in preparation for heaven, pass without our taking account of the progress we have made, or whether we have been making progress at all? We

are daily advancing to the grave and the judgment. Shall we not enquire, are we advancing to the heavenly world and in meetness for the enjoyment of it? What though we cannot compute depth of feeling or conviction with exactness, or compare feeling and practice now, with feeling and practice six months ago, as accurately as we can compare and note the difference between one set of figures and another, is that a reason why we should not set the record of memory over against the testimony of our present consciousness, and form some judgment of what, during such given period, we have been doing in regard of spiritual and divine things. Is it nothing for us to know, whether and to a great extent we have been advancing, nothing to rejoice in, and for which to give God thanks; or nothing to know whether and to what extent we have been retrograding; nothing over which to mourn, and to seek God's forgiving mercy.

I take it, every true Christian will be anxious to make such periodic enquiry. He knows the result must be beneficial. The Christian does not, must not, dread knowledge. The knowledge of himself may be, must be, often painful and mortifying. But it is never safe to be without it; the his better we know ourselves the more sense shall we have of Son, our need of the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ that knowledge which St. Paul counted all things but loss that he might obtain. Have I advanced? How has it been? That will give me a lesson how I may advance yet more. Have I advanced? Is there not a tribute of gratitude due to the God whose grace has enabled me? Have I advanced? Is it not an encouragement to proceed on my Christian way, and to hold fast the beginning of my confidence steadfast unto the end. Have I advanced, but far less than I had hoped, far less, than under all circumstances, I should have done? Then is there not cause to be humble before God, to seek his mercy to pardon me, and his grace, that in the time to come I may be more faithful to my Chris.

tian profession and more fruitful in every good work? Have I fallen back? How has it been? What has caused it? Under what temptation have I fallen? What circumstances have proved injurious to my principles? What passion within, what tempter from without, has assailed me? To what besetting iniquity have I given way? Have only my thoughts strayed from God and what is good? or have evil thoughts been expressed also in evil words and in sinful actions? Wherein have I dishonoured God, and disgraced my Christian profession? Have I fallen back? Is it not meet I should bless God, who has not yet suffered me to fall into perdition? Is it not meet, I should bless God, if he has given me the knowledge I have so fallen, the sense of my guilt in having so fallen, the sense of my danger in having so fallen? Is it not meet, I should humble myself before God, and ask his mercy and strength from on high to begin a new and holier course? Ah, surely, he is no Christian, nor impressed with any just sense of his duty to God and to his own soul, who is disinclined to put questions which shall lead to such convictions, prayers, and purposes as these are.

And there are seasons when such enquiry is specially befitting, and when it can be made with special advantage. The season of communion is one of these. It returns at stated intervals. It is a time for self examination, enjoined by an Apostle as necessary before eating of the sacramental bread and drinking of the sacramental wine. It is a time for looking into the mind, what its views are; into the heart, what its convictions are; into the life, how these convictions are carried out in practice. It is a time for enquiring into the reality of our faith and the proofs of it. It is a time for enquiring into the truth whether Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, and whether, and to what extent, we in our lives, exhibit his temper and reflect his image. Did we use the communion season so many months ago for these ends? Then we came to some know-

ledge of ourselves, what we were, wherein there were marks of grace, wherein there were evidences of deficiency in the virtues of the Christian life. Then we came to the knowledge of sins which did beset us, of temptations which were wont to prove too strong for us, of circumstances which we felt it would be well for us to avoid, of duties which it would be indispensable for us to perform, of self-denial, which we should feel bound to practise. This knowledge cannot all have fled away from our memories like the morning cloud or the early dew. It may not be preserved with the accuracy of a written register, such as is preserved of mercantile transactions. But it is more or less perfectly stamped upon the mind. We know enough of it, to compare it with what we now feel we are, and believe, and feel, and do ; that is with the self-knowledge which another approaching season of communion is urging us to seek. How then stands the comparison ? Wherein does the one differ from the other ? During so many days, weeks, months that have passed away for ever, so many Sabbaths, so many opportunities and privileges, after so many prayers, so much reading of the Scriptures, so much of listening to the preached word and so many convictions of its truth and of the duty which it imposes, what has been done ? What for the glory of God ? What for the good of men ? What in obedience to the lessons of conscience ? What in the subjection of sinful passions ? What in the expulsion of evil thoughts and base desires ? What in rising to a state of purer and holier virtue ? Has much been done ? Has anything been done ? Has nothing been done ? Yea, more than nothing, have promises been forgotten ? Have vows been broken ? Have we looked back and turned back ? Are our consciences defiled ? Do many sins and shortcomings start up in fearful array to dismay and alarm us ? Has our goodness been like the morning cloud and the early dew ? Instead of advancing heavenward, have we been drawing back ?

All this it is competent for us to ascertain, and I entreat all, to be at pains to ascertain it. "Prove your own selves." Seek that ye know your own selves. And take for the present this special period wherein to make your inquiries. In mercantile life, such investigation and balancing of accounts as I have spoken of, requires to be done at short intervals, else the work would become unmanageable. It becomes still more difficult in the spiritual life. For as time passes, the memory of the past becomes more imperfect and a fair comparison is more difficult to be made. You then who sat down at a Communion Table six months ago, set yourselves to the enquiry as to your spiritual progress up to this period? Then you vowed to God. How have you kept your vow? I know not how I can set you a better course of preparation for coming again to the Holy Table than by urging you to such inquiry. I feel from myself, I know from the general experience, that such inquiry will be humbling. Ah, but it is well we should be humble. It is because we are not humble enough, that we are such poor Christians. We need to be humbled. We need to be convinced of sin. We need to be low in the dust under a sense of our own utter unworthiness. Such humility, such conviction, would be the first steps to a better state. They would bring us to Christ for pardon. They would bring us to Christ for strength; and bringing us to Christ, they would bring us to Him who can do all for us. In any wise therefore, I entreat you, enter on this inquiry, prosecute this inquiry. How am I as respects my knowledge of God, or my assurance of his mercy to my soul? How am I, as respects my love to Christ and likeness to Him? How am I, as respects my preparedness for death, and judgment and eternity, as compared with what I was, when I last sat down at a Communion Table? Have I fallen from the love I felt then, or can I say my last love is greater than my first?

Nor is it only you, who sat at a Communion Table, whom I would set on such inquiry. I would have all to look back and make such comparison. All are advancing to the judgment seat of God. Were it not well that all should anticipate that judgment by now judging themselves? Six months ago, you judged yourselves unfit to observe an ordinance which requires only, to the observance of it, that we have that love to Christ without which, an Apostle says, we are Anathema, Maranatha. Then, you were not good enough, well, are you better now? In the lapse of so much more of the time of your earthly probation, have you got any nearer your own standard of what a Christian should be, of what any one should be, before he sits down at a Communion Table? Have you reflected more seriously of the things which concern your everlasting peace? Have you felt more deeply their unspeakable importance? Have you been induced to read the word of God more, or to pray more? Have you struggled more successfully with sin and with temptation? Have you any more knowledge of Christ, or love to Him? Any more desire to do his will and seek after conformity to his image? Now that another season has come round for holding communion with him, and doing him honour by keeping up the remembrance of him in the world, have you any more desire or any more fitness to take advantage of it? Something of all this, some of you, I doubt not, promised yourselves should be attained before this time. Has it then been attained? or are you no nearer now to the Kingdom of God than you were before? Nay, are you not farther from it than ever? Has the habit of putting away all serious and sustained consideration of divine things become only more confirmed and more difficult to be dealt with or altered? Has conscience ceased to bear its testimony so loudly, against your neglect of duty or your practice of sin, and is your apathy greater in respect of all that most concerns

you, as moral and immortal beings? I entreat you to consider how it is with you. Prove your own selves. Know your own selves. You are familiar with the enquiry in regard of temporal things. What am I worth now, as compared with what I was, six or twelve months ago? Is it not worth while to enter on the inquiry also—What am I now, as the moral creature of God and responsible to him, compared with what I was? Am I growing in grace and godliness, becoming a better and holier man, leading a more useful life, likely to die a happier death, and having evidence, better and more abundant, that God is preparing me for the enjoyment of the heavenly kingdom?

In fine, I would have the religious solemnity, to which in the good providence of God we are now looking forward, to prove the occasion for all, to enter on this balancing of spiritual accounts, this sustained and anxious examination of their spiritual condition. What, if such inquiry should lead some to fear, that as yet they have been dead in trespasses and in sins. Let them rejoice, that it is still the day of the merciful visitation of God, and that still God waiteth to be gracious. What if others be penetrated with remorse and shame while they consider how little progress they have made, how little of all they had hoped to be they have yet become. Let such be stirred up to work with redoubled zeal and diligence now, as knowing that the night is at hand when no man can work.

And let no one of us put lightly away from himself the solemn consideration of these things. How ill does levity become an immortal being, a responsible being, a sinful man! How low has sunk that nature which cannot be roused to serious consideration, by any views of God or of eternity. How hopeless the state of him, who with an idle word or silly jest can put away the question of his own salvation—put it away that is for a time, for it will return, in circumstances when he must

deal with it, on a death bed, and in the prospect of entering into eternity ; unless indeed, as may be the case, he be called away, as some are, without a moment's time for the consideration of their spiritual state, and their spiritual wants. That which is common, however precious, comes often to be but little regarded. Now it is a common thing for you, to hear of your duty to God and to your own souls, to hear of the love of Christ and the claims of that love upon you, to hear of the eternal world, and the necessity of making preparation for it. You expect to hear of these when you come here ; you are pleased to hear of them while you are here. But you, many of you, think no more of them when you depart. There comes to be in many a Christian congregation—I say not how far it is in this—only a kind of playing at religion. The outward forms are gone through, but the inward life and spirit are wanting. So little fruit appears, that the minister comes scarcely to expect it. And the people are contented, if their religious sensibilities be momentarily excited, though the excitement should never terminate in any practical reformation. It was said once of the stern and faithful Ezekiel, when he prophesied of old to the chosen people, “Lo thou art unto them, as one that hath a pleasant voice and playeth well upon an instrument, for they hear thy words, but they do them not.” But it will never do to make religion thus a play, though a decent one. We may not be in earnest, but God is in earnest, inviting us to repent, and warning us of the coming wrath. We may not be in earnest, but Christ was, when He gave his life for us, and is now that he pleads with us and for us. We may not be in earnest, but all in heaven and hell are in earnest, the former in the enjoyment of eternal glory, the latter in the darkness of the lost and outcast. We may not be in earnest now, but one day we shall be, when God lays his hand upon us, when he strikes down our nearest and dearest, when he lays us on the bed

of death, when he places us before the throne of judgment. Would it not be well to be in earnest now, earnest to know God, earnest to serve God, earnest to be meet for the enjoyment of God.

Is any one here in earnest now—earnest in his desire to be Christ's, and partaker of all the benefits of his sacrifice and death, to have pardon and peace, assurance of divine love and experience of divine grace? I know no reason why he should not come to Christ now, receive his word, and trust in his power and promises. He has not to do some great thing. He has not by prayer and penance to establish a righteousness of his own; that he will never be able to do, though he should live for untold ages. After years and years of such striving to be good enough to come to Christ, he will be no more welcome to him than he is now. It is a gift, a free gift, the sinful soul needs—the gift of pardon and assurance of divine love. Wilt thou have it now, O sinner? Is not Christ ever present? Is he not ever gracious? Is not his hand ever stretched out to give? If thou wouldst but receive, if thou wouldst but trust in his grace, there would be a sense of divine love shed abroad in thy heart, there would be a new song put in thy mouth, even praise to our God, there would be the purpose in thy heart to confess thy Saviour, and doubts and fears and difficulties would all be dissolved and done away, in the contemplation of his power to save. "Dost thou now believe," Christ says now, as of old, to the disciples. "Only believe, and thou shalt see the glory of God."

XXV.

COMMUNION WITH GOD.

EXODUS XXV. 22.

I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat.

WHAT is it, let us consider for a moment, what is it, for one man to commune with another? It is for each to express to the other thought and feeling—the thoughts that are passing through the mind, the feelings which are uppermost in the heart. I talk with a friend; he sees my countenance, he hears my words, he comprehends the sentiments I utter, the better for my very looks and tones of voice while uttering them; and he responds in a way equally clear and manifest to me—look, voice, speech, all giving to me an insight into his heart, mind, conscience, such as through the same media he has had given him into mine. Imperfect no doubt is such insight, even when the desire is strong to give and to receive it. There are thoughts which pass through the mind of every man, which he finds it difficult to express in words. There are feelings in every heart which lie too deep for utterance. There is often a want of congeniality of feeling, or a difference in intellectual capacity, tastes, pursuits and actual attainments, which renders the expressions of the one but dimly and uncertainly intelligible to the other. Still there is a visible and sensible intercourse. Thought passes from mind to mind. Feeling is communicated from heart to heart. There is a felt communion, an interchange of thought and feeling known and assured to each, between two beings each independent of the other.

Now, in a measure and to a certain extent, such was the communion with God promised to Moses, and subsequently, though in a way perhaps less clear to the senses,

enjoyed on great and solemn occasions by the High Priest. In the most sacred part of the tabernacle, before the erection of the temple, afterwards in that part of the temple which was called the Holy of Holies, was placed the Ark of the Covenant, a small chest or coffer containing the two tables of the law which the Lord gave to Moses on Mount Sinai, a golden pot full of manna, and the rod of Aaron, which budded in a night to give miraculous testimony to the divine appointment and authority of his priesthood. The lid or cover of the ark was called the propitiatory or mercy seat. It was of solid gold and at the ends of it were two glorious forms of cherubim looking inward and with expanded wings overshadowing its whole circumference. On this, under the old dispensation, rested the Shechinah or cloud of glory, which was the visible symbol of the Divine Presence. Therefore was the ark called the footstool of God, and Jehovah was said to dwell between the cherubim; and everywhere the chosen people, when they prayed, turned their faces to the place where the ark stood. It was in this sacred place, that God promised to meet with Moses, and from above the mercy seat, that He was to commune with him of all things which he was to give him in commandment unto the children of Israel. And it was not by an impression only made upon his spirit, without the intervention of any sensible means, that God was pleased to speak to him. There was a visible glory. There was an audible and articulate voice. Thus it is said, in the eighth chapter of the book of Numbers, that "when Moses was gone into the tabernacle of the congregation to speak with Him," that is, with God, "then he heard the voice of one speaking to him from off the mercy seat, that was upon the ark of testimony, from between the two cherubim." There was thus evidence, sensible evidence, of a separate presence, a Divine Presence; nor amidst all the awe which must have filled his soul, could he entertain any doubt of enjoying direct and immediate communion with God.

There was a time too, in the world's history, when such direct and immediate communion with God, ascertained to the senses, and in a degree greater than was ever vouchsafed to Moses, was possible for men. At the time appointed in the counsels of heaven, God was manifest in the flesh. He, of whom an Apostle testifies, that He was the Brightness of the Father's glory, and the express Image of his Person, became partaker of flesh and blood. In the man Christ Jesus dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. He was in the Father, and the Father in him. Who saw him saw the Father also. In the communion of the disciples with Jesus, there was thus communion with God, unspeakably freer, fuller and more perfect, than Moses ever enjoyed, while he stood in the tabernacle of the congregation and listened to the voice which came forth from above the mercy seat. From human lips, with looks of love, with accents of tenderness, with tears of compassion, all which men could know and feel, came God's words, his purposes and promises of love, to those who lived in daily intercourse with Jesus. The Shechinah, or visible symbol of the Divine Presence, which rested on the mercy seat, was the glory of the old dispensation. The liberty of drawing nigh to Him, who dwelt between the cherubim, was its highest privilege. The promise to commune with man from off the mercy seat was its most gracious promise. But all this grace and glory were cast into the shade by the manifestations of a later age and a better and brighter economy. That which passed away was glorious, but that which came was more glorious still. Nor have the children of men ever enjoyed such communion with their Maker, not even the first parents of our race in their state of innocence in the garden, as when "the Word, that was in the beginning with God, and was God," "was made flesh and dwelt among them, and they beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

It is true an unbelieving world knew him not. Even the disciples, who waited on Jesus, did but imperfectly comprehend the high privilege which they enjoyed in their intercourse with him. To one of them he had to say, in tender remonstrance, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?" Yet from another came the noble confession: "Lord, to whom can we go but to thee. Thou alone hast the words of eternal life; and we know and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And all of them comprehended at last the exceeding grace of that close, direct, and intimate fellowship with Jesus, in which they had communed with the incarnate God.

But that glory, too, has passed away. As the Shechinah left the ancient temple, and Jehovah dwelt no more between the cherubim, neither communed with man from off the mercy seat, so the Son of God has left this earth, which he had made his temporary abode, and has ascended to the right hand of the Father. It is not given to any now, nor shall be, till the restitution of all things, to see Him in the nature which he assumed, to look on his sacred countenance, to listen to words of divine tenderness falling from his lips, or directly to receive from him the lessons of heavenly wisdom which once he imparted to his disciples. The period of that peculiar communion has come to an end. And how stands it now with the Church? Is there any communion with God vouchsafed still to believing souls? Does God yet sit on a mercy seat to commune with his people? Is there intercourse still between heaven and earth? May the believer draw nigh to God in assured confidence that God will draw nigh to him? And through what medium does the soul now have fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, so that it shall not only speak to God, but God, as of old, commune with it?

Doubtless, it is of the elementary truths of the Gospel,

that the believer has at all times free access into the presence of God, and full title, through the mediation of Christ, to speak to him. What would any soul desire to utter unto God—any soul, recognizing its relation to God, and its dependence on him? Humble confession of sin, thankful acknowledgment of mercies, earnest petitions for pardon, for grace, for whatever is needed to lighten its darkness, to soothe its sorrows, to uphold it amidst temptation, to give it the enjoyment of heavenly peace, to inspire it with living hope and holy love and bestow on it the life everlasting. All this we are called and encouraged to say to God in prayer, an exercise commended to us by the most gracious promises and by many a recorded example of its efficacy. Now this is much, very much, unspeakably much, for any child of man to know. That I may enter into the presence of the Great King! That I may speak to the Infinite and the Eternal! That I may call him by the tender name of Father! That I may conceive of him as revealed in the Son! That when, in the solitude of the closet, I bow my knee and raise my thoughts, to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, I may be sure his eye is upon me, his ear is open to my call, he has regard to my wishes, he has sympathy with my sorrows! That amidst all the vastness and glory of the material universe, which he upholds and governs, and the countless hosts of living beings which all wait on him for support and for the opening of his hand to supply their ever returning wants, “my way is not hid from the Lord, nor my judgment passed over from my God!” That there is love, in the great Spirit with whom I have to do—love after the nature and measure which Jesus manifested in life and death! That God still sits upon a mercy seat in the heavens, reconciled and gracious, through the mediation of that Blessed One, whom he did himself appoint to be the propitiation for our sins! Oh, is not this much to know and to believe; much, if we receive it

with true faith—that faith which is the evidence of things not seen—to fill the soul with the joy that is unspeakable and full of glory?

But is this all? The soul may speak to God and count in doing so on the tender regard of God. But does not God speak in answer to the soul? Communion is not the outpouring alone of one spirit, but the interchange of thought and feeling between two. In the garden, while man was yet in the state of innocence, Adam not only spoke to God, but he heard also the voice of the Lord God speaking to him. When Moses went into the tabernacle of the congregation, it was not only to speak to Jehovah, but to listen to the voice of one speaking to him, from off the mercy seat that was upon the ark of testimony, between the cherubim. In the days of the manifestation of God in the flesh, the disciples did not only speak to Jesus. He also spoke to them, and while He did so their hearts burned within them. How then is it now? Is all expression of thought and feeling on one side only; on the side of the weak, the sinning, the helpless and dependent children? And does no sign of recognition come from the Almighty Father? Hath he no medium now through which he speaks, no living, loving, ever efficient representative here below, taking the place of the Shechinah under the old dispensation, or of the only begotten Son, in the days of his personal manifestation to men? Are these no longer befitting words for a believing soul to utter, or expressive of a feeling which it may legitimately entertain: "I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints."

Assuredly, we shall not think rightly if we do so judge. This is the better and brighter dispensation under which we live. Hear how the Apostle reasons in his second epistle to the Corinthians. "If the ministration of death," that is of the law, "written and engraven on stones, was

glorious, which glory was to be done away, how shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious"? There are still media of communication between the believing soul and God, by which not only the believer's voice may be heard of God, but God's voice be heard by the believer, as surely as when it came from above the mercy seat; aye, and as tenderly, and with as much power to comfort and encourage, as when it came through the lips of that well-beloved Son, in whom the Father was ever well pleased.

For first, there are Christ's words, the words of God, preserved to us in the Scripture record. It is not only, when in immediate contiguity, not only when catching the tone of the voice or looking on the play and expression of the features of the face, that there is communion between man and man, between mind and heart on the one side, and mind and heart on the other. That can be done by means of written, as well as of spoken, language. The letter, which my friend sends me across the ocean, places me in communion with him, as mine in turn places him in communion with me. The interchange of thought and feeling can thus be carried on as well as by the living voice. I can be made as fully aware of what the mind of another is, and he can be made as fully aware of what my mind is, on any particular point on which we desire to commune together, as if we met and talked with one another. Now, the written word is such a letter from God, expressing, not on one point, but on all points needful to be known, the mind and will of God in regard of us his creatures. Through it, God speaks to us. Through it, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, still speaks to us—Jesus, who bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, and who, in the glory to which he is now exalted, is still touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Through it, we have communion with God, not only that we speak to God, but that by it God speaks to us.

But is it then only by the letter of a written communication that God does now commune with his children? It is much that he does so. It is much that he ever did so. David said of old of such communication: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart." And Christ said of his own words, "They are spirit, and they are life." But is this all? By letters graven on stone, God spoke to his ancient people. But then he spoke also to his servant from above the mercy seat. Is there no living voice now, no forth-putting of divine energy, no manifestation of divine love, no sign or token now from God to the believing, praying, longing soul, which seeks not only to speak to God, but would have God speak to it? It is much to have truth revealed—written down to me in a book, which I can read and study from day to day. But it would be more, to have a living agent presenting that truth to me as it needs to be presented, making it clear to my mind, suitable to my necessities, powerful over my heart. Is there not now a divine presence and power to do this?

It is our high privilege that there is. It is the word of Christ that there is. The Divine Presence, the immediate and gracious power of God, is not withdrawn from his children on this earth, though the Shechinah does no more rest on the mercy seat between the cherubim, and though the beloved Son of the Father does no more tabernacle among men. When the special manifestation of God made by Jesus in the human nature was at an end, the peculiar dispensation of the Spirit began. When Jesus was about to leave the world, he cheered with loving words and promises the drooping hearts of his disciples, and specially he assured them—"I will not leave you comfortless,"—"I will not leave you orphans," so it is in the original, I will not leave you, that is, without the

immediate care, and guidance, and superintendence of a love and wisdom to be present with you, and like my own. "I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever: even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." And again he said: "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart I will send him unto you. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of Truth, is come he will guide you unto all truth: He shall glorify me for he shall receive of mine and shew it unto you." And in due time these gracious promises were fulfilled. The special dispensation of the Spirit was ushered in with the miraculous display of the day of Pentecost, cloven tongues, like as of fire, appearing to the disciples and sitting on each of them; even as the special appearance, of the Son of God become man, was ushered in at his birth, in the manger of Bethlehem, by a choir of angels singing "Glory to God in the highest: Peace on earth, and good will to the children of men." And now this blessed Comforter, dwelling in the souls of believers, guides to the truth and gives it power over the heart and conscience.

Christ's words in the New Testament—for they are all his, whether spoken by himself or by his Apostles—when had ever words such power? Plain words, simple words, they are, yet they have touched the hearts of men, and comforted the souls of men, and upheld in life and death, imparting more abundant consolation and more exalted hope than any that were ever spoken. Whence this power? Whence this capacity to touch all the hidden springs of action, and to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ? How is it that such words as these, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," spoken eighteen hundred

years ago, in a distant land, by one who could say that the foxes had holes and the birds of the air had nests, but he had not where to lay his head ; how is it, that such words as these, have been from age to age, as balm to the weary and wounded spirit, and proved to so many souls a source of unfailing consolation ? How is it, that in the lapse of time, they lose none of their efficacy, but each generation of mourners, under the consciousness of sin and apprehension of the world's vanity, turns to them for comfort, and finds it in them when it is nowhere else to be found ? Ah, it is the Spirit that quickeneth. It is the present Comforter who speaks them inwardly to the soul, and gives them power and efficacy. Does some word of Jesus touch thy heart, O, thou weary and heavy laden, under the burden of thy sins or of the world's cares ? Does it bring tears to thine eyes ? Does it elevate thy desires ? Does it raise blessed hopes within thy soul and give thee comfort amidst thy sorrows ? It is the Comforter who is with thee ;—it is the Spirit of him who communed of old with his servant from above the mercy seat, who is speaking to thee. He has received of Christ and is shewing it unto thee.

And thus it is that God still communes with his believing children. They come to him in their need. They come to him in prayer and supplication. They pour out their hearts before him. They present their petitions at his throne ; and not in vain has it been said, "While they are yet speaking I will hear them." No glorious vision appears to the eye. No divine voice falls on the ear. But the Comforter is nigh in the heart, and though we cannot tell how he acts—for the working of the spirit is as the wind which bloweth where it listeth, and we hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth,—yet he guides to the truth, in the written word which no longer a dead letter, but having power and sweetness and constraining efficacy, even as spoken by

a living voice, clears up the darkness amidst which the soul was bewildered, soothes its sorrows, and communicates that of strength and stirs up that of gracious and holy affection, which is needed. And so there is a real and felt communion. The soul speaks to God, through the medium of prayer. And the Spirit of God speaks to the soul and communes with it, through the medium of the word.

Nor in laying claim to such communion is there room for a charge to be advanced of folly and fanaticism. For it is not alleged, that the Spirit adds to the word revealed, but only that He suggests and shines upon it. Nor does He stir up any affection or implant any temper in the soul, but such as Jesus enjoined and exemplified. Canst thou point to nothing in the written word, bearing testimony to the truth which thou thinkest God hath spoken to thee? Then thou hast no authority to say or think that God hath spoken to thee at all. Thine own imagination, or a lying spirit, hath deceived thee. Has thy fancied communion raised in thee envy or pride, or any temper alien from the mind that was in Christ? Then it is not the Spirit of truth that has been abiding in thee, but the spirit that now worketh in the hearts of the children of disobedience. But if thou canst point to the truth in the word, making thee meek and lowly in spirit, filling thy soul with holy joy, and causing the love of God and man to glow more warmly in thy heart, then it is the Comforter that is with thee, and, through the word, He is communing with thee, as Jehovah did of old with Moses from above the mercy seat.

It is the conviction, that this divine agency accompanies—from age to age accompanies—and gives potency to the words of Christ, which enables the believer to regard without dismay or apprehension the assaults of an infidel philosophy, directed against the Gospel. Christ's words have never in any age commended themselves to all to whom they were spoken. Christ spoke of those who were

given to him. In no age have all been given to him. In all time there have been those hostile to him, to his cause and kingdom. And manifold have been the objections which a captious and unbelieving spirit has raised and put forth against the truth which he taught. When one form of infidelity has been put down, another has appeared. That which is now appearing assumes a different shape from what tried the faith and exercised the learning and the logic of our fathers. That it will be met, that all its specious pretences will be exposed, that the objections of the learned will be met by a more profound and extensive learning, that the objections of philosophic thinkers will be met by the reasonings and conclusions of a sounder and truer philosophy, all the experience of the past, and even what is doing now, may justly warrant us to expect. But apart from all such defence of the truth, as it is competent for man to make, there is ground of confidence in the truth itself, accompanied as it is in the case of all whom the Father hath given to the Son, with the effectual working of the Holy Spirit of God. No time shall ever come, when this divine testimony shall cease to be borne to the words of Jesus, or when the force of that testimony shall, by any opposition of men, be overcome. "One thing I know," each is and shall be able to say, to whom that testimony is borne, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." One thing I know, that whereas I was in darkness, now I am light in the Lord. And however vain men may bewilder themselves, the simple and honest heart will find rest in the wisdom and grace of the Gospel.

One thing it does yet behove us specially to consider, in respect of this holy communion with God, through his Spirit, the promised Comforter dwelling in the heart, guiding it into the truth and giving it power; that we may have it, and that we may realize it more and more in our happy experience. It is not in any way that God may be ap-

proached, or the soul venture to hope that it may have communion with him. "God is love," says the Scripture, but it says also, both in the Old Testament and in the New : "God is a consuming fire." It was on the mercy seat that God was to be communed with of old. Now the mercy seat was that on which, and before which, the blood of the victim was sprinkled by the High Priest, on the great day of atonement. And it was typical of Christ, through whose blood shed for many, for the remission of sins, a new and living way has been opened up for sinners, even to the Holiest of all. Jehovah on the mercy seat is God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto men. And the believer approaches now to the mercy seat, when he comes to the throne of grace, in humble dependence on the mediation of Christ and on the efficacy of that sacrifice which Christ offered. Faith in the work of Christ, his atoning death and sufferings, does both destroy the enmity of the natural mind against God, and lead the soul to contemplate God as gracious, loving and reconciled. Thus it creates both a desire to have communion with him and a capacity of having it. Only through Jesus, the propitiation for our sins, can we hope to have such communion, peace-giving and sanctifying. "No man," saith Jesus, "cometh unto the Father, but by me."

You then who desire to have communion with God at this time, in the Ordinance of the supper, look unto Jesus ; see in the symbolic bread and wine the memorials of his death for sinners. Plead the merits of his sacrifice. Trust in the efficacy of his intercession. Then shall God commune with you, by his Spirit, without whose blessed working in the soul the Ordinance is no better than an empty form. The elements used in it are without virtue in themselves, and he who administers them can communicate no virtue to them. They are common bread and wine. Christ is not in them. But if with believing minds

you receive them as symbols and memorials of Him, Christ will be in you, by his Spirit holding communion with your spirits, and bestowing on you abundantly of His heavenly grace. Nor is it only at a Communion Table that such grace may be expected. In the solitude of the closet, in the exercise of prayer, in believing contemplation of Christ, and while sympathizing with the Psalmist, when he said, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak," it is given to the Christian to know and feel that God does still "speak peace unto his people and to his saints," and that his Spirit witnesseth to them "that they are the children of God ; and if children of God, then heirs ; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ."

Now may God grant unto us all to have such communion, pledge and earnest of better and higher communion in the world of light and glory above. And to His name be everlasting praise.

XXVI.

DUTY PROCEEDING FROM A SENSE OF DIVINE LOVE.

PSALM CXIX. 32.

I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.

WHEN any soul is fully awakened to a sense of its relation to God, it feels immediately the necessity of obedience to the divine commandments. Conscience proclaims the rightness of such obedience, and reason teaches the wisdom of it. God is our Creator, and may claim it on the ground of right. He is our continual Preserver and Benefactor, and may claim it on the ground of the gratitude we owe him. He is a Master. Do we not owe him fear? He is a Father. Are we not bound to give him reverence and honour? How can I be safe—the awakened soul justly argues—how can I be safe, while placing myself in opposition to God? Can the result of such opposition be other than disastrous? What am I that I should fight against God? Is it not written truly; “Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker.” And must not woe unutterable be the portion of the sinner? Not merely because of the power of God, though that can consume and overwhelm every adversary, nor yet merely because God has denounced such woe, though heaven and earth shall pass away before one word of God shall pass away, but because there is, and must be, such inherent evil in sin. The law of God is the expression of an all perfect reason and of infinite goodness. Must not opposition to what an all—perfect reason dictates be ineffable folly? Must not the result of such opposition be the opposite of that happiness, which infinite goodness contemplates—even wretchedness and misery? “Ah,” it is the

language of the awakened soul, "I must do the will of God! To be happy in time or in eternity, I must do the will of God! I must in any wise, run the way of his commandments."

And so that awakened soul sets itself to do the will of God, a wise and happy course for it to take, though it perceives not at the time all the reasons which concur in making it a wise and happy course to take, nor is able to contemplate in the primary exertion to which its new-sprung anxiety leads, that the most precious fruits of such exertion will be the humility which it will produce, the mortifying consciousness of inability to do all that reason, conscience, and God's word, do yet declare needful to be done, and the being shut up to receive a revelation of grace and mercy suited to its wants and weakness. The truth is it is a right course. Conscience says it is. And the soul choosing it and taking it, because conscience says it is, is right in taking it. And God's blessing is on it and good comes out of it, though not the good the soul expected. Probably that good was perfect obedience, and the perfect peace which is the fruit and natural result of perfect obedience. But how far short of any such perfect obedience does that soul soon find itself to come, awakened, and earnest, and labouring, and striving, though it be. Soon it finds how exceeding broad is the law of God. Soon it finds commandments which it overpasses all its strength to keep. How shall it love God supremely? How shall it act as ever under his eye? How shall it have all its tempers and dispositions ordered in conformity with the law of love? How shall all proud, vain, sinful thoughts be expelled? How in short shall the image of the first Adam, fallen from the state of innocence, be transformed into the image of the second Adam, the Lord from Heaven? The struggling soul is overwhelmed with the task, with the greatness of it, the burden of it, the hopelessness of it. Again and again it despairs of success and is tempted to stay its unavailing efforts. But what

shall it do? Conscience is not satisfied. The threatenings of God are not turned away. The state of opposition to God is not less dangerous. The fear of God's judgments urges to renewed trial. And the hope of better success urges to it. But the hope proves deceitful; and the soul, try as it will, cannot as it feels it should, "run the way of God's commandments."

It is an era very memorable in a man's moral and spiritual history, when he begins the struggle we have described, unavailing, though it does and must prove for the immediate and direct attainment of the end it contemplates. And it affords to the man versed in things spiritual, good ground to hope well of him, in whom he sees it. But it is not the era of conversion, at least of the conversion which is needful to salvation, of the great change, moral and spiritual, which the Bible, in this speaking according to the most obvious dictates of enlightened reason and the convictions of every man in thorough earnest about religion, declares to be necessary. The despondency of the soul caused by its failure in every effort which it makes to work out for itself a perfect righteousness, such as God requires, may terminate in two ways; and one of these is the way of destruction, for it leads to renewed indulgence, without effort to check or resist it, in sin and the pleasures of sin.

There is a despair of success in running the way of God's commandments, which the sinful soul sometimes makes an argument for continuing in sin, following in this the temper and spirit of the idolatrous Israelites of Jeremiah's time, when they said, "There is no hope, no, for we have loved strangers and after them will we go." It is as if it said: "I have struggled with sin, but have never succeeded in the struggle. I will struggle no more. I have prayed, but my prayers have been in vain. I will cease to engage in an exercise which I feel to be so fruitless. The force of passion, I find too great for me to resist. I cannot

change the worldliness of my affections. I cannot break the chains of sinful habit, with which I am bound. The sacrifices which religion requires are too hard for me to make. The commandments of God are too strict and spiritual for me to keep. There is no hope. What can I do but cease from the unavailing struggle"? And so some souls do cease. And the anxiety they have felt for a time passes away ; and the pleasures of sin entice them more and more ; and the chains of sin are wound more firmly and inextricably round them ; and conscience in them is seared, and the Spirit is quenched, and they are led captive of Satan at his pleasure ; and finally they drop—those lost and miserable souls—into the pit of destruction.

But the soul's despair of success in working out itself a perfect righteousness such as God requires, may lead to a different result. It may not dissipate the anxiety about being in a right state with God. It may lead the soul to look around for other means than it has tried, or has within the compass of its own resources, to get into that state. It may prompt the inquiry of the jailer at Philippi, in alarm and trepidation under an awe of the mighty power of God, What shall I do to be saved? It may shut up to that one way of salvation which is revealed in the Gospel. It may prepare the soul to listen with attention, with interest, with joy, to the glad tidings of the salvation that is in Christ. It may lead it to the cross, and to the contemplation of that work of redemption for sinful man, which was brought there to its final consummation in the death of the anointed Son of God—that death, which this day over the sacred symbols of His body and blood, it has been our privilege to show forth and to commemorate. Then there is another era in the sinner's moral and spiritual history. Anxiety and awakening from carnal indifference about things spiritual and divine, marked the first—a sense of God on the soul, an awe of God, a feeling of duty to God, a fear of the terrible judgments of God,

a struggle to please God, a struggle often renewed, though always unsuccessful, to "run the way of God's commandments." The second is marked by what in the text is called "enlargement of heart ;" and this enlargement of heart, whatever it be, so working on the man's nature and influencing it, that thenceforth he can run, cheerfully and with alacrity, "the way of God's commandments."

Now what is the nature of this "enlargement of the heart," which the Psalmist expected from God, and which he felt to be so needful to the active obedience which God requires ? The answer to this inquiry can best be given by examples, illustrating the general meaning of it and shewing what must be understood by it in the case before us. Take an example. It is not so long ago, but that many of us can remember a time, when under the visitation of God hundreds round us were dying of a pestilential disease, the ravages of which no human power could stay, and the extent and duration of which no human wisdom could calculate. One day we conversed and transacted business with a man, as much in the enjoyment of health and as full of life and likely to live as ourselves, and the next he was in the grave. So it might be, any day, for anything we knew, or for anything we could do, with ourselves, or with those whom we loved and valued most. There was but a step between us and death. Was it unnatural in such circumstances, that there should be a deadness, a depression, in regard of the ordinary business, interests and employments of life, causing these to be pursued less earnestly, less energetically, less diligently, less successfully ? Was not the apprehension of being suddenly called away from all these, fitted to damp our zeal and energy in ordinary occupations ? Was not this at least the effect on many ? And when such apprehension was removed, when the same Divine hand, which sent the scourge stayed its ravages, and it was felt again, that for a season at least the terror of it was past ; was it not as if a

weight were lifted from the spirits and a new impulse given to the energies of nature, under the action of which we could do what before it was a trouble to us to think of? This was in its way an enlarging of the heart, such as the Psalmist speaks of, and attended with effects analogous to those which he expected to flow from it. And deliverance from fear and apprehension tending to deaden and depress the natural energies of the soul, is one thing that is necessary to produce it.

Take, however, another example, plain and familiar enough. A servant has given what he feels himself to be a just ground of serious offence to his master. He is daily, hourly, in fear of its being discovered, of his being called to account for it, of his being subjected to deserved punishment on account of it. He has in these circumstances, as he would feel and say himself, no heart for his work ; it does not go with his heart to do it. What he does, he does not do well and as it should be done. Suppose him unexpectedly pardoned, freely, fully, kindly pardoned, the offence he had committed. He is then not only freed from the apprehension which deadened or impaired his energies, though that alone would be, according to the former illustration, an enlarging of the heart ; but there is given to him, in his grateful feeling, a new principle, a new motive to duty, in addition to what he had before, the possession of which, as it were, "enlarges his heart," increases that is, both his desire and capacity to perform the duties of his station. Such increased desire and capacity for the discharge of duty is "an enlarging of the heart," such as the Psalmist expected. And the implanting of a new principle of activity in the soul is the way to produce it.

Take yet another illustration of this enlarging of the heart. Take the case of a man whose pecuniary affairs are in state of embarrassment—such a state of embarrassment as to render him hopeless of being able to extricate them ; whose energies are paralyzed, by his very sense of the

greatness of the necessity there is for energy—by the consciousness he has that no energy, no exertion, no activity can recover his fortunes, or place him in circumstances to meet his engagements. Effectually to rouse such a one to exertion, it would be no way at all simply to urge and enforce the occasion there is for it, or to set forth the ruin that awaits him. He would say, feeling it as he said it, that exertion was now useless. You would only by urging him depress him more. You would only bind more firmly round his neck the burden that is weighing him to the dust and crushing and enervating him. But could you remove the load ; could you wipe off the debt which he cannot meet, and make him feel himself again free and unembarrassed, would you not expect exertion then ; would you not expect, that he would betake himself with spirit and alacrity to his proper avocations and pursue them with renewed life and energy ? Then you give him hope—hope of success—and the presence of hope tends even as before the removal of fear, or the implantation of gratitude, to “enlarge the heart,” to increase that is, its courage and capacity for the work that is to be done.

Now, in tracing the progress of the awakened sinner, we had brought him to the cross ; we had brought him to the point, that in despair of his own labours and efforts, labours and efforts which had yet been necessary to produce such despair, he was listening to the Gospel, the glad tidings of mercy to pardon and grace to help, both freely offered to the soul, by and through Jesus, the Mediator. And now we would have you to observe, that his simple, cordial, believing reception of this Gospel of the grace of God as the truth, is the commencement of the era of enlargement of heart, in which he has power to run the way of the divine commandments. And it is easy to see how it proves so, in all the three ways which the illustrations used suggest.

In the first place, till the believing reception of the Gos-

pel message of forgiveness through Jesus Christ, there is the burden of fear and apprehension on the awakened sinner's conscience—fear and apprehension because of guilt already contracted, because of punishment already deserved. An ungodly mind, sunk in indifference about things spiritual, and little realizing the relation of man to God, its duties and its responsibilities, has no experience of such fear and apprehension and little sympathy with it. But it is a very real and depressing fear not the less, and acts like all fear in deadening and depressing the natural energies of the soul. What heart has any man to strive to “run the way of the divine commandments” when he is continually feeling and ready to say, I am lost already! I am sunk in sin! I am under the curse! What avail any efforts I can make? I cannot blot out the black catalogue of my sins, which is written down in the book of God's remembrance. I cannot alter the sentence that is already recorded against me. And so feeling, no demonstration of duty or danger, no exhortation to perform the one or to flee from the other, will of itself effectually enable him to struggle against sin and temptation. No, the burden must be shaken off, that his heart may be enlarged and the natural energies of the soul again called into action. And where is this to be done, or how? Bunyan knew it, and taught it impressively in the allegory with which, from our childhood, we have all been familiar, when he represents the heavy burden, under which he had groaned almost with a feeling of despondency, dropping from the back of Christian as he came to the cross, and he was enabled to go on his way rejoicing. It is when the awakened sinner knows, believes, relies on God's promised mercy through Jesus Christ, that his fears pass away. The power that had paralyzed him before is then destroyed; and in the sense of this new energy imparted to him, his glad and prompt inquiry is that of the Apostle, when he was apprehended of Christ Jesus on his way to Damascus: “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”

But secondly, the reception of the Gospel message of forgiveness through Jesus Christ, enlarges the heart by implanting a new principle, which gives increased desire and capacity for the discharge of duty. That is the principle of gratitude. You have the lively exercise of this principle described in the hundred and sixteenth Psalm, one of the most touching and pathetic of all the holy hymns which God has caused to be preserved for the worship of the Church. When the Psalmist was released by the grace and mercy of God, from the sorrows and pains which had well nigh overwhelmed him and shaken the foundations of his confidence, both in God and man; and when he could say, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee; for thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling," how did he express the feeling so created within him? "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me"? And what was his energetic and holy purpose. "I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living." And who but feels, that under the impulse of this new and most animating motive, his heart and the whole powers of his nature must have been enlarged and called into greater and more availing action, in the service of his God. And it is even so with every awakened sinner receiving the Gospel message, comprehending in some measure the grace, the power, the love of Christ. Something of the gratitude that swells the song of the redeemed in heaven, to Him that loved them and washed them from their sins in his blood, glows in the believer's soul, and it seeks vent, in the very way which the Psalmist indicates in the text—in glad obedience to the commandments of God.

Once more, the heart of the sinner receiving with the simplicity of faith the Gospel message, is enlarged by the presence of hope—hope of success in the Christian warfare with sin and with temptation. This the believer cannot but feel. For how can he but judge, that if God has

done so much for him, he will not fail to do what still remains for his final deliverance from evil? How can he but judge that the gift of the Son is a pledge of the aids and grace of the Spirit, and that God being his helper, all enemies must in the end give way and be overcome. But how animating a principle in every department of human life is hope. And it is not less so in the religious than in the ordinary life. Yea, it is said by St. Paul, "We are saved by hope"; such is the power and the impulse which it communicates to make the believer "work out his own salvation" and "run the way of the commandments of God."

Observe, I entreat you, the end and purpose of this enlarging of the heart, brought about by so marvellous a manifestation to the soul of the grace and love of God. It is the keeping of the commandments. That indeed is the declared end of the Gospel, and it would be of no value if it did not lead to that end. The Gospel does not alter the nature of things. The Gospel does not alter that ordination, which takes its rise in the holy and all-perfect character of God, according to which happiness is connected with holiness. The Gospel is not to be set in opposition to the law, as if the one took its origin in the more mild and merciful, and the other in the sterner and more severe attributes of the Godhead. No, the law is loving as well as the Gospel. It is the glory of the Gospel that it enables believers to obey the law, delivering them from condemnation and implanting the principle of obedience. Let not any one judge, that any conviction he has felt, how strong or solemn soever, is the enlarging of the heart of which the text speaks, unless it constrains him "to run the way of the divine commandments."

To run, observe too. There is vigour, there is activity, there is life and zeal and energy implied in this expression. It is not any kind of obedience which will satisfy the heart which God has enlarged, and which He is moving to action under the impulses of gratitude and hope. That heart

aspires to a perfect obedience. The faith of a Christian not only prompts to obedience ; it prompts to perfect obedience. In proportion to the perfection of the Christian's faith, it produces a more perfect obedience. If the Christian's faith were perfect, his obedience would be perfect too. By such perfect faith, his heart would be so moved as to make him run, without fall or stumbling, the way of the commandments of God ; and as it is, even though imperfect and often weak and wavering, it receives the precept of the Lord, and strives to reach to a performance of it, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect."

Communicants, if this day your hearts have been enlarged in the holy services in which you have been engaged ; if a sense of the love of Christ has given you this enlargement, prove it, manifest it, as the Psalmist proposed to do. Run the way of God's commandments. Why should you be called Christians at all, if you are to be, and to do, no more than others ? Why should you enjoy Christian privileges and observe Christian ordinances, if you are not, because of them, to lead a better and holier life ? Indeed, it becomes all of us, who have this day sat at the table of Christ, to be conspicuous for the virtues which even the world honours. How else shall we adorn, in the world's eye, the holy doctrine we hold and our Christian profession ? Justly is it expected of us, that we be noted for a more high-toned principle of integrity and honour, that we be more sacredly regardful of the claims and the obligations of truth, that we stand more decidedly aloof from the unlawful indulgence of any sensual appetite, that we be more alive to the claims of distress, and actuated by warm and heartfelt charity to all. Justly is it expected, that we should more effectually restrain every ebullition of temper, and that in thinking or speaking of our fellow-men we should not be moved by a spirit of censoriousness, but take up in regard of them the milder, and often the truer, and sounder judgment of charity. Justly is it expected,

that we be exemplarily kind and faithful in all domestic duties, in all social relations, better as masters and servants, as parents and children, better as neighbours and members of one common society. If there be not in us a marked improvement in these respects, how is that to be expected which yet is equally needed, greater spirituality of mind, greater devotion to God, greater zeal in his service, greater efforts to advance the Kingdom of Christ and to extend the number of his willing and obedient subjects upon the earth. We are bound to distrust and condemn every kind of religion, no matter how fair in aspect or solemn in feeling, which fails to lead to these results, which does not tend to increase our desire and our ability, and lay us under a constraint, not as of necessity but willingly, to "run the way of God's commandments." For no religion but that which has such efficacy can terminate in a death of peace and a happy entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

XXVII.

THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH EXPECTED BY ST. PAUL.

PREACHED IN TORONTO, AT THE OPENING OF THE SECOND GENERAL
ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA.

EPHESIANS IV. 11, 12, 13.

And he gave some, apostles : and some, prophets : and some evangelists : and some pastors and teachers, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ : till we all come, in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

THERE are two books given to men to study, both coming from the same divine hand, the Book of Nature and the Book of Scripture. From the patient study of the former, there is ever resulting the discovery of new truths, truths unknown before even to the wisest ; and neither the number nor the greatness of the truths which have already been discovered affords any reason for doubting that more unspeakably shall yet be attained. Science, with all its past triumphs, is but in the beginning of its career, and it is reasonable to believe, they are only the first fruits which have yet been reaped of that magnificent harvest, which shall finally reward the application of human genius to the study of the works of God.

Now some such discovery and development of truth, new and before unknown truth, there are who expect also and equally to find in the study of the Book of Scripture. There are analogies doubtless, points of resemblance, between these two great books of God—analogs such as were to be expected in works coming

from the same Divine Author, and which it is in many respects important and interesting to remark and study. Is then this one of them, even the capacity of developing ever new truths to the diligent student? And as, from age to age, men are ever adding to the truths which have been drawn from the study of material nature, may they also hope to be adding to the truths which have been drawn from the revealed Word?

In dealing with this question, it has to be admitted in the first place, that the labours of those who have been most diligent and most successful in the application of their time and talents to the study—the critical and scientific study that is—of the Divine Word, have seldom resulted in what may be called discovery. They have rendered some scriptural argument more clear. They have placed in a better point of view some scriptural truth, or principle, or character. They have cleared away some of the difficulties which attach to books written in ancient times, and in languages which have long ceased to be spoken. They have illustrated allusions to customs which prevailed in remote ages and distant lands. But, after all, no great or leading truth unperceived before, unperceived from the beginning, or which was not patent to the apprehension of ordinary readers, has by means of them been attained. And when something new has been started, it has not unfrequently turned out that error was made to take the place of truth, by the application of unsound and unwarrantable principles of interpretation, to what had been more legitimately and rationally understood before.

It is to be considered, in the second place, that Christianity, in its doctrines and principles, has been in the Scriptures revealed plainly and fully to the apprehensions of plain men. Men needed such plain revelation to their attaining peace with God, and for the government of their

lives ; and the Gospel gives it, so that they who run may read and understand. The corruption of man's nature by reason of sin, the evil and the danger of sin, the unspeakable mercy of God in the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ, the work of the Spirit of God in renewing and sanctifying the hearts of men, the future life, the future judgment, the future and righteous retribution—these have been, are, and always will be, the great truths and doctrines of the Gospel. It is not to be thought that any study or any time will ever evolve from the Christian Scriptures truths greater than these, or even equal in rank to these. No such development of Christianity is to be expected. Nor is it needed for the great ends, for the accomplishment of which the Gospel revelation was made. Nevertheless, there may yet be in a variety of ways, and growing out of a more intelligent study of the Divine Word, and that too, in combination with a profound veneration for its authority, what shall in effect amount to discovery—discovery in some degree analogous to that which rewards the patient inquirer into the wonders of the material world, and which may be fitted to tell powerfully on the condition of the Christian Church, even as the other tells powerfully on the condition of mankind in general.

And first, isolated passages of Scripture, particular texts, may be interpreted differently, and more soundly and justly, than has yet been done. We are naturally disinclined to think the correctness of our present interpretations questionable. But there is a lesson to be gathered in this matter from the history of the Church. Whatever others may think, no sound Protestant does doubt, or can doubt, that for many centuries the Church, undivided, or only divided into the Eastern and Western branches, did grievously misunderstand and misinterpret certain passages, and with most mischievous consequences ; as for example, our Lord's words to St. Peter,

after he had acknowledged Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God ; or the words He used in the institution of the ordinance of the Supper, "This is my body." Have we any reason to suppose, that by supernatural interposition or otherwise, we are safe from all danger of such misunderstanding and misinterpretation ? Can it be claimed for the Reformers, or for the divines in the ages that followed them, that they were infallible in their interpretations of the Divine Word ? The claim of the Roman Church is that it cannot err. Is our claim—the claim of any portion of the Protestant Churches—only thus far different as has been scoffingly said, that we never do err ? Is it not possible that still we may be under misapprehension of some portions of God's word, on which light may yet be made to shine, so as completely to carry the convictions of the Church in favour of another and better understanding of them ?

And such light on Scripture, suggesting new and sounder interpretations, amounting almost or altogether to discovery, may still more be expected in the examination to which all humanly formed systems of religious doctrine will yet be, and before any large union of Christian Churches can take place, must be, subjected. It has not pleased God to declare his truth to men in the form of creeds, and confessions and catechisms. It has come to us in histories and biographies, in psalms and prophecies, in proverbs and parables, scattered over the pages of many authors, and in works written with the usual variety of human taste and talent. It has not come to us in the form which human reason would have anticipated as the least likely to give rise to misapprehension and division. In this, as in other things, God's ways are not as our ways. But in the study of God's ways, there always shines forth the evidence of a divine and heavenly wisdom. The Scriptures from their very variety are

suited to gain access into men's minds, however differently constituted. A mind which revolts from abstract truth may be won by the charm of a narrative in which the truth is embodied. One who has no sense of the pathos or the sublimity of poetry may be gained by a chain of connected reasoning ; and one who cares little for the rules of logic may receive truth most readily, when clothed in the forms which a lofty and passionate imagination suggests ; while another may be reached most effectually by the point and terseness of a proverb or a parable. The Scriptures have all these, and are varying as the varying tastes and habitudes of men's minds, yet ever, and in all their variety of form and expression, containing the truth which it is man's greatest interest to know, to receive, and to obey. It is well that in point of fact such religion as we have is taken from them. We have a confession and catechism, which we greatly value and reverence ; but which of us, for once he looks into them, does not look a thousand times, or ten thousand times, into the Bible ?

Yet it is no doubt the natural tendency of the mind to form truth into a system, or to seek that it be so formed. It craves, that what of faith and practice is scattered over so large a surface and expressed in so many ways, should be condensed into shorter compass and put in plain words ; and good purpose has been served by giving way to this natural desire. Truth so condensed is more quickly learned and more easily remembered. The relations of one truth to another are more readily apprehended, and there is opportunity afforded for protest against error ; yet the difficulty is obvious of so summing up the truth, on so many great subjects as are treated of in such variety of ways in the books of the Old and New Testaments. The variety of the systems which have been drawn from the Scriptures, and their differences from one another, demonstrate the difficulty. Nor can the claim of perfect accuracy or of infallible authority be admitted to

any of them ; while there is this peculiar disadvantage in respect of them all—whether Protestant or Catholic, Socinian, Arminian, or Calvinistic—that whoever heartily adopts any of them, is thenceforth too often and too much disposed to interpret Scripture in conformity with his system, rather than to correct his system by a just interpretation of Scripture. Now, were this tendency changed, were this order reversed, it is reasonable to think there would be discovery, not in regard of one system only, but of every one—discovery of error, discovery of truth, in effect new to the adherents of each.

Once more, in the patient study of Scripture, while it will be found that it is all profitable “for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,” and none of its teaching without importance, it will also appear more clearly and fully than heretofore, that all truths in it are not equally essential, and that in regard of many, a difference of view does not imply any serious deficiency of Christian principle. Attached to the decrees of the Councils of the Roman Church, there is anathema pronounced on whoever receives not implicitly whatever dogma is laid down, whether the matter be great or small, of little or of much importance, as respects the duties of life or the way of salvation. And there was a disposition among the Reformers to consider precise uniformity of opinion on the subjects of their teaching, as equally necessary to Church order and to the spiritual safety of the individual. But Christianity has produced a better and wiser spirit, more tolerant of difference in points not held to be fundamental, and less inclined to see ground of separation in such difference of sentiment. There has been much in this respect already accomplished. The articles of the Evangelical Alliance are few in comparison of those of most Protestant creeds. We Calvinists meet readily with our Wesleyan brethren, who hold Arminian views, and join heartily with them in thanking God for

the great and good work which they have been enabled to accomplish. Nor would any of us, I imagine, be disposed to think an entire concurrence in the articles of our Confession on the Divine decrees, essential to a man's being a child of God, a member of Christ and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven. But more will in this regard be done, as the Scriptures are more read, more prayed over and more practised ; and the true bond of brotherhood will be found, not in agreement on a multitude of points to which an unscriptural importance has been attached, but in the presence of love to the Great Master Himself, and in the presence and power of those loving and gracious affections which He enjoined and exemplified.

But it is not so much in the discovery and development of new truth, as in the new and better application of Christian principle to the duties of life, that analogy will be found between the progress of science and of Christianity. Recent times have not been more, or perhaps so much, distinguished by the discovery of new principles in science—new truths before unknown,—as by the application of these principles to directly practical purposes. Such application of scientific principles to practical purposes, and the study of nature with the view of making such application, distinguish modern from ancient science. And in particular they have distinguished the science of our own age—the science of the long interval which has intervened from the close of the great revolutionary war. The powers of nature have, in manifold ways and to an extent wholly unprecedented before, been made subservient to the purposes of men. These powers always existed. Nay, many of them were long known to exist. It was the possible and proper application of them for useful purposes affecting the material enjoyments and the ultimate advancement of mankind, which was unperceived. That application, in the extent to which it has gone already, has led to the most magnificent results—results

affecting more or less directly the whole human race, and having added incalculably to the means of increasing the happiness and advancing the improvement of mankind. But no one imagines, or has any right or reason to imagine, that there is an end now or henceforth to such application. On the contrary, we may be sure that the greatest, and in point of fact the most magnificent result, of the successful application of the powers of nature to human purposes, is the impulse given to continue such application—to seek at one and the same time for the more complete development of the powers of nature, and for the more perfect application of them to the purposes of men. We can hardly stigmatize as extravagant or chimerical any expectation of the results that are yet to flow from such application, after the wonders which have already been accomplished. Nor is it to be doubted that through the medium of science some portion shall again be restored to man of that original dominion, which had been allotted to him in his state of primeval innocence and purity.

Now, can any such development of Christianity take place, it may be said, as this of science—development, not of hidden truths, but of the right and proper application of known truths? The truths and principles of Christianity have respect to duty. They are, when honestly entertained in the mind, powers, forces so to speak, acting on the soul and disposing it to duty. Can they not only dispose to duty, but develop it, give extended views of it? May it not be possible so to apply the truths and principles of Christianity to the circumstances of human life and to the state of human society, as to indicate clearly new duties—duties that is, which had not heretofore been perceived as such, while yet retaining all their power as a moral force to lead to the discharge of these duties? I believe they may, and that they will; and that it is in this direction, the application namely of the great principles of Christianity to human duty, not in the

discovery of new doctrines, or even an extended apprehension of the old, that the development and growth of Christianity are to be found.

How possible such application is will best appear from an example. Among the names most honoured, and most deserving to be honoured, of those good men who were made instrumental in the revival of religion in the Church of England, which took place well nigh a hundred years ago, is that of John Newton—a man distinguished not only for his own labours, but for his close connection with two men, in their different spheres eminently useful to the Church and to the world—the poet Cowper, and Scott, the commentator on the Bible. In his early life this remarkable man had been to the last degree profligate and immoral. But by a series of circumstances, very peculiar in their nature and no doubt graciously arranged by the Providence of God for that end, he was brought to repentance, and to the saving knowledge of divine truth. He became a sincere and devoted Christian, experiencing the power of divine grace in his heart, and manifesting it, both in his reformed life and in the spiritual experience of which he has left the record; and the latter part of his long life was spent in preaching the Gospel as a zealous and faithful minister of the Church of England. It is at and for a considerable time subsequent to his conversion—his, there is no reason whatever to doubt, genuine conversion to God—that he furnishes the illustration which our subject requires. Then he was the captain of a slave ship, engaged personally, engaged actively, in the most wicked traffic that ever disgraced mankind; and evidently not seeing anything in it, inconsistent with the principles of that holy religion which yet in heart and spirit he had embraced. And so for a considerable period, he afforded the extraordinary spectacle of a man of devotion, delighting in the word of God and prayer, and a man exercising himself to have a conscience void of offence,

denying himself, and watching with earnest anxiety over his appetites and passions, lest he should be induced to abuse, either in the way of cruelty or of impurity, the unlimited power which he possessed over so many of his wretched fellow creatures, yet blind utterly to the essential iniquity and hatefulness of the traffic itself, in which he was engaged. Subsequently, he did regard it in the light of Christian principle; in other words, he applied to it the great principle of Christianity, the law of love, and then he saw it in its true character; then he renounced and abhorred it, and joined himself with the band of Christian patriots, who succeeded, after the struggle of many years, in obtaining the Act of the Legislature denouncing and abolishing it.

Now, what was true of one man in regard of one thing, may be true of many men, yea, of the whole Church, and in regard of many things. He applied not the Christian principle, which yet he had honestly embraced to the particular case, and so he was blind to the duty which lay upon him in regard of that case; and the Church generally, while yet holding true Christian principle, that is truth in the abstract, and holding it truly, that is with genuine and undissembled sincerity, may yet have failed to apply that principle to a multitude of cases and circumstances of daily occurrence, and so may be blind to the true course of duty. There would be no development of new doctrinal truths so-called—such truths as that of the atonement, or the work of the Spirit of God in men's hearts—did it make such application. But there would be a marvellous development in its apprehensions of duty, in its view of all that which God requires, and to which Christian principle prompts when fairly allowed to speak and to work in the souls of men. And this is the development of Christianity which after ages are to see, when the great purpose for which God hath “given Apostles and Prophets, Evangelists, pastors and teachers, even the perfecting of the

saints," has been accomplished, or brought at least to a far higher pitch of advancement than has yet been attained—and believers have come "in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

We might take another illustration of the same thing, from the history of the Church itself, more particularly of the Churches of the Reformation. For how long a period of time did these Churches, almost without exception, certainly without the exception of the Church of Scotland,—which however distinguished and deserving to be so for other things, was in respect of this as dark and dead as any of them—for how long a period did these Churches continue utterly indifferent, at least utterly inactive, in regard of the extension of Christianity in the world? It scarcely appears as if this had been contemplated, as an end which men were to pursue by active exertion. It seems as if it had been supposed that the way of human instrumentality, which God had used in propagating the Gospel and in reforming the Church from the corruptions into which it had fallen, was no longer to be employed in the extension of divine truth among men; nor was the law of love felt to require, that what the believing soul acknowledged to be to itself God's best and richest blessing, should be communicated as far as possible to others. It cannot be denied that there were as true and genuine Christians in those days as in ours, that they loved the truth, that they held it in sincerity, and were sanctified and saved by it. But neither will it now be denied by almost any, that in regard of this great subject, there was a deplorable absence of the application of right Christian principle, that the Church did not only fail to do its duty, but that it was blind to it, that it did not know it—did not know what was not only a duty but should have been regarded as an honour and a privilege. Neither in the individual case with which we began, nor in this, affecting large numbers and for a

long period, do we at all question the genuineness of their Christian principle. They knew that principle. They had embraced it. Many of them would have died for it. Some of them did die for it. But they applied it not to the particular points which I have mentioned, and the fact—undoubted—that they did not, renders it quite a possible thing that the Church now may, without any imputation on the sincerity of its faith, be blind in regard of other points of duty, affecting materially the well-being of mankind and the approach of that time when believers are to come “unto a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”

There is a vast difference no doubt between knowledge of what is duty, and the discharge of it ; and often these are miserably divided, the knowledge of duty leading to no practical discharge of duty. Yet, while this is so in individual cases, and while the knowledge of duty and the discharge of it can scarce be said in any to keep pace together, so much do the temptations of the world and the remaining corruption of our nature impede the moral progress even of the best, yet usually and on the great scale, there is a connection between the knowledge of what is right and the doing of it. There is power in that which clearly commends itself to the consciences of men ; and above all there is a power in that which commends itself to the consciences of Christian men, of men under the influence of the truth. When therefore, the general mind of the Church is enlightened in regard of any duty, there follows on the whole, though not it may be, to the extent there should, nor even approaching to it, yet a great change of conduct in the right direction ; and the continual testimony borne to the discovered duty tells at last even upon others who are less influenced by Christian principle. It was the application of Christian principle to the odious traffic in slaves which first demonstrated its evil, and showed to Christian people what was their

duty in regard of it ; but the ranks of those who opposed it were ultimately swelled by multitudes who acquiesced in their conclusion without having cordially embraced the Gospel principles which had led to it. And so it will be, and it has been, in similar cases. The application of Christian principle to duty raises everywhere the standard of duty, even among those who are not in the strict sense of the word Christians. And what at first it required the exercise of high and pure Christian principle to do, comes to be done generally and as a matter of course by all. Such is the importance of the Church rightly applying Christian principle to the circumstances and relations of human life. Not only its own, but the general conduct is ultimately guided thereby. This is the government of the world which is given to the saints. It is not the government of force. It is the government of opinion, the power wielded by the declaring and maintaining right moral views and principles—a power greatly beyond that of the mightiest of kings or statesmen.

This government is to be traced in the history of the world from the first introduction of Christianity. It was this government, the government of Christian opinion boldly maintained, which put an end to the cruelty and the impurities of idol worship ; which abolished polygamy ; raised the female sex from degradation and oppression, and rendered crimes, which the wisest and best of the heathen seem to have practised with but little remorse, impossible even to be named. It was this, which abolished the cruel shows of the gladiators, in which hundreds of unhappy beings massacred each other or were torn in pieces by wild beasts, for the amusement of a fierce and ignorant populace. It was this, which extinguished throughout Europe the system of domestic slavery, which extinguished slavery through the dependencies of the British Empire and in the neighbouring great Republic, and which is ever advancing with bold and hopeful step to the abolition of

slavery in every form in which it is found in any land. It was this, which erected those asylums for the sick, the poor, the destitute, the widow, and the orphan, which now abound in all Christian countries, and set agoing the numberless means now in operation for the education of the ignorant, for reclaiming the vicious, and raising and purifying the whole of society. Nothing can be of greater consequence to the world than that the Church should rightly understand its duty, rightly apply, that is, the Divine principles which it has received, and which it holds, to peculiar cases and circumstances. For it has in the motives of the Gospel the moral force which leads to the manifestation of what it knows, and the practice of it; and with it, the government of society, the government of opinion in matters of duty from which the greatest and happiest results proceed, does always ultimately lie.

Now this application of Christian principle by the mass of Christian men, whom and not any body of ecclesiastics, or any sect into which Christians have been divided, we call the Church, has always been gradual. The principles of Christianity were the same when spoken by the Apostles that they are now. And they remain unchanged, and unchangeable in the written word which they have left us. But the application of these principles has been progressive, and often like the application of the powers of nature under the direction of science for the ends of human life and enjoyment, a matter of discovery. The duty of toleration, for example, of allowing men to worship God in their own way, which surely was involved most plainly in the Christian precept, that we do to others as we would have them do to us, what was it, but a discovery about two centuries ago? Neither Protestant nor Papist acknowledged it. It had been as little known, or thought of, as the power of electricity was thought of a few years ago, for the purpose of communicating thought from one distant place to another. And there is no more reason to

think or to believe that a period has been put to such moral discovery, to discoveries of duty made by the right application of Christian principle to the affairs and circumstances of human society, than there is to believe that a period has been put to the further application of the physical powers of nature. The Church is not yet so enlightened as to need no more light. Still are believers far from having reached "in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." And just as the triumphs of science in the natural world give glorious reason to expect progress and advancement in subjecting the powers of nature to the dominion and the uses of man, so do the triumphs of Christianity already gained give token of more and greater yet to come, when its principles shall not only have increased power in regard of duty that is acknowledged, but shall have received a far wider and juster application to the circumstances and necessities of society.

What if these principles, for example, were as openly and consistently applied in the case of nations and their intercourse, as in the case of individuals? What if they were applied to the horrors of war? Would they sanction the halo which both history and poetry throw around the greatest, or almost the greatest curse, with which nations can be visited? Would it not appear, may it not yet appear, a duty to put it down, as evident as it was to put down the traffic in slaves? Is there not everywhere growing up a higher application of the principles of Christianity to the duty of temperance? May there not yet grow up a sounder and juster application of these principles to the establishment of educational and religious institutions under the authority of Christian governments, free from the evil on the one hand of restraining such governments from using the most powerful of all means for good, and on the other, from the evil of permitting them to render

such institutions inefficient, or the means of gratifying an intolerant spirit? May there not grow up sounder views in regard of the application of wealth, making the application of it directly subservient to the law of love, instead of to the principle of selfishness? May it not hereafter appear, not to individuals here and there, but so generally, as to constitute in regard of that matter a new standard of morals guiding the general opinion and the general action, that all power, the power of station, the power of intellect, the power of wealth, should be used directly to promote the general good, and not personal or family aggrandizement? May it not hereafter appear just as wrong and foolish to spend all life in acquiring wealth, to be employed only in selfish objects of some kind or other, or accumulated for a family, as it now appears wise and right? May not a clearer understanding of the great law of love, the law that we should love our neighbour as ourselves, introduce a far greater community in the possessions and the enjoyments of mankind, and Christianity become, as it only can become, the author of that real socialism and brotherhood, for which so many apart from Christianity are now blindly striving?

Once let duty on Christian principles be shewn, shewn to the apprehension of the general mind of the Church, and then the change—great as it must needs be on society and the world—will come. In this as in all things, truth is great and will prevail; truth backed by the influence and the motives of Christianity. For Christian duty never stands naked and alone. It is not like the maxims of worldly wisdom or of heathen sages. It is attended with the constraining power of Gospel truth. Whatever the duty to which Christian principle clearly calls, there are always motives sufficiently great to urge to the performance of it. What will constitute such motives, if not the love of God in Christ, if not the hope of a glorious immortality. The change therefore to which

higher views of duty point will be effected. And from a higher standing point in morals, Christians of future days will wonder as much, how true and genuine Christians could act in relation to themselves, and in relation to their brethren, as is common now, as we wonder when we look on John Newton converted to God, and praying and wrestling with temptation in his cabin, yet the captain of a slave ship.

This is the progress we are to expect. This is the glorious development of Christianity which we are to look for. Well did the wise Preacher say: "Say not thou, what is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this." The latter days are the better days. The cause of truth, of righteousness, of God, is ever advancing. The time is approaching when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the whole earth, and when believers shall come in the "unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Happy they, who help forward this glorious consummation! Happy they, who in their own persons are tending to it! Happy they, who are in the advance in this mighty progress, which nothing can finally stop, nor even the gates of hell prevail against it! Happy they, who cherish in their hearts and manifest in their lives, that holy charity which shall one day bind the whole race of man into one family of love, over which Christ shall reign, and God rejoice as of old, when He looked on the six days' work, and behold it was good. Meanwhile, if we be Christians at all, following the instinct, if we may so term it, of the new and spiritual life which prompts us to seek after advancement and perfection, we will endeavour to apply the principles of Christianity to ourselves and our people according to the best light we have, and with prayer to that God who is both light and love, for more light and more love. We, I say,

will endeavour to apply the principles of Christianity more thoroughly, more wisely, more constantly, to our own circumstances and condition, so that we may have more enlarged and accurate apprehensions of our own special duty. The question of the Christian is ever that of St. Paul at his conversion, "What wilt Thou have me to do?" The prayer of the Christian is that of David of old, "Teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God. Thy Spirit is good, lead me into the land of uprightness." The temper of the Christian is that of the speech which Eli put into the mouth of the youthful Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." And having this temper, there will and must be progress both in knowledge and in grace, in light, and love, and happiness. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord. His going forth is prepared as the morning. And He shall come to us as the rain, as the former and the latter rain to the earth."

